

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO MAINTAIN A VILLAGE

Roque Bluffs Selectmen's Update

October 2020. Volume 1: Issue 3

As the weather begins to change and the sky darkens earlier, we turn our thoughts and activities to preparing for the winter season. This predictable change in seasons is accompanied by a continued awareness of the on-going pandemic. Schools have opened; some level of normalcy has been achieved. Yet we still feel and see the unease among many. We encourage all of you to be kind to one another. We remain aware of those things we all have – the many blessings in our lives. By caring for each other, our community has been and will continue to be greatly strengthened. We want to encourage all of you to continue to help each other – especially as we enter the cold and flu season. We, the Selectmen, are blessed by the support and help from many in our community in getting things done. We are so grateful for everything that people have given.

We want to extend our sympathies to our Chapel family and friends. This summer we lost Joe Sippel to Covid 19. Joe and Jean returned every year to Roque Bluffs from Virginia at least once, and sometimes twice. Close friends of the Locketts, Joe and Jean joined right in with Chapel activities. Our hearts go out to Jean and to those who knew and loved Joe. He will be missed.

This fall, we also lost Eileen McKinnon. Eileen served on the Board of Directors since the Chapel reopened in 2002. She was instrumental in securing the agreement from the American Baptist Convention to use the church building. She was a force to be reckoned with when she was on a mission! She worked tirelessly at the Chapel. She kept the church community laughing with her stories. She loved her home in Roques Bluffs. She will be missed by all of us.

We are happy to report the success of the annual report. Because of the referendum, the report took on a different format. Carla did an outstanding job of designing it to look as much like the ballot as possible. This helped eliminate confusion. The referendum itself went smoothly due to Carla's skillful organization. The challenge of having to do things differently due to the Covid-19 moved us to new ground for getting the town's business done. All went well and we were able to approve the budget. Many thanks to Carla for all the work and time and energy she put into this.

Fiber Optic Update

We are still working on hiring an engineering firm. We thought we had one, but that agreement fell through. We have now narrowed our search down to two firms; we are waiting for their proposals and once we have those, we will make a choice. We have been

told that the engineering contract will take 30-60 days to be approved by the USDA. While we await approval of the contract, we will begin to look for construction firms.

In the meantime, we are starting the pole licensing process. Our first step is to provide proof of insurances that each of the companies that have ownership of the poles (Spectrum, Consolidated, and TDS) requires. Those requirements include a surety bond and liability insurance. The requirement for the surety bond can be met can be met through a line of credit. The Board has secured that line of credit from the Machias Savings Bank this past week. We are still working to acquire the liability insurance. All of this must happen even before we enter into a preliminary agreement with the companies who own the poles. Contracts with the pole companies will follow and then the licensing process can begin. It takes about 6 months – so they say. As with all other USDA statements, we will see. We are happy to report that 121 households have signed up for the Broadband. Again, we are all trying to be patient in order to bring this much-needed utility to our town. We will keep you informed.

Fall Road Maintenance

We are keenly aware of the resources and infrastructure that we have. We also recognize how important it is to maintain them in a timely fashion in order to reduce crisis type situations. Ditching was completed on the paved part of the Duck Cove Road. The edges of Johnson Cove Road have been mowed. A portion of the Town landing that our fisherman use has been paved this fall. Thank you, Owen Moody, for overseeing that work! Reports are that our salt and sand supply is in and ready when we need it. The fire station doors will be serviced this fall. We are coordinating that job with Jonesboro so we can share a mileage charge. A culvert on Johnson Cove Road has seen some highly active beavers this month. We are looking into a system called a “Beaver Deceiver”, a wire cage that will legally prevent further conflicts and still allow the beavers to do their own work. We appreciate Ricky Harmon’s efforts on our roads – especially with the culvert. He had help from Russell Manchester and Philip Pinto in keeping the culvert unplugged and the water flowing.

Selectmen’s Actions

We as a board are determined to communicate with you and to let you know what is going on. We call it transparency. Transparency is easy for us when things are good; we like to report on those issues! However, we are facing a major challenge at the Town Hall. We have discovered serious inconsistencies in the way municipal documents have been handled, managed, and stored in the past. By law, all municipal documents are the property of the Town. As such, any document that records a Town action or decision should stay in the Town Office. We have turned to our town attorney, Kate Grossman, for advice about what to do. She has given us several steps to take.

First, we have appointed a Public Access Officer (PAO). Maine state law requires that each town have one. With the exception of confidential documents, the PAO provides

copies of *any* Town document to the public. In September, we appointed Carla Wood to oversee this activity. Anyone who needs any publicly available municipal document may make a request to her in writing. She will make copies for anyone. There will be a small charge for those copies.

In our second step, the Board created a computer-use policy for all Town computers. Working with Nick Landrum, The Computer Guy, we have defined a set of rules for consistent use of computers where municipal documents are concerned. The ultimate goal of this policy is to have *all* Town business accomplished exclusively on Town computers. This policy will help to maintain records of Town actions and decisions.

Our third step was to adopt a municipal document management policy developed by Kate Grossman. In the future, all documents will be maintained in the Town Hall and will not leave the Office. Copies may be made if something needs to be completed at home. We cannot recover what has not been maintained well in the past. However, going forward we will work diligently to be in compliance with Maine law and to have all records on file in the Office and available to the public. All current documents are and will be stored in our new filing cabinets in the Town Office.

Fourth, Kate Grossman who is our town attorney will provide a training session for all municipal officials. That session is scheduled for November 4, 2020 from 2:00-3:30 at the RBCC. We will observe social distancing and masks are required. We want every municipal official to have the same information and understanding. The plan is to record the session for anyone who cannot come or for any new official in order that they receive the same, important information.

We are insulating the office basement in order to create good storage space in which to keep those older records we still retain. Scott Hanscom is overseeing this project. Volunteers are helping with this effort to keep down the cost. Additional shelves have been built for the document storage boxes. A dehumidifier has been purchased for use in warmer weather to keep the basement dry. We are taking a systematic approach to managing our older documents and upgrading the environment in which they are stored.

Additional Changes among Municipal Officials

We have a new Animal Control Officer, Steve Seavey. Our former one left the position and we welcome Steve to work with us. You can reach Steve at 207 214 7050. Michael Schoppee is the new 911 Addressing Officer. Carla Wood is the Assistant Addressing Officer. If you have need for a 911 address, please contact her at the Town Office.

Working Together, We Get Many Things Done

All of us are enjoying the new paint and restoration job on the Community Center's exterior. Much has taken place on the inside as well! The entry, kitchen, main room, and

floors have been repainted; a new gallery hanging system installed; the moldings completed; a new chandelier donated and installed; and new curtains hang in the windows. Many people volunteered to help with this project. We celebrate and congratulate you on all the work you have accomplished and continue to do to protect and upgrade this important gathering place for our community.

The Tax Commitment

The Board of Assessors and the Certified Assessor met on October 9, 2020 to complete the commitment for the town. This is the process by which taxes for the current year are set. It was completed. The following week our certified public accountant, Jim Wadman, notified us of an error which had raised too much income -- \$55,000 – for the Town. We have shared that information with the Assessors. The Commitment will have to be completely redone. As of this writing, we do not have a date set to recommit on this year's taxes. Before we learned of this error, some of the tax bills (A-D) had already been sent out. You may disregard those. If you have sent in your taxes already, our CPA has told Carla to hold those checks until we have a new commitment. Again we, as your select board, are dedicated to communicating with you and committed to transparency about all town business. We appreciate your patience as we work to make this right.

In The End

As October comes to a close, the next few weeks are fraught with political uncertainty. We want to take this moment to celebrate the blessings of our tightly-knit community. This board sees people helping each other, encouraging one another, and caring for those in need. This past March, we faced the unknowns of COVID. Our governor encouraged us that with kindness to each other, we could get through this. The last eight months have shown this to be true. We all have had to do many things differently and we, as a community, have responded well to this challenge. We hope that everyone will continue to support friends, neighbors, and your community. With that in mind, we wish each of you the best of safe and healthy holidays

Sincerely,

Scott, Owen and Karen

One Community Working Together Through Courtesy, Consideration and Civility