
Town of Rockport, Maine



Town Manager's Office

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Town Manager's Report & Update March 11, 2024

Town Clerk:

Primary Elections. At the primary elections on Tuesday, March 5th, 665 Rockport voters participated in the first election held at the library. The full results of the election are available on the Town website.

While the change to voting at the library was certainly an adjustment for all involved, the turnout was relatively small but expected. Our Public Works and Police Departments worked to support this change by adding signage along Limerock and Union Streets to ensure parking was widely available. Though we had a low turnout, parking was of little concern for those who voted that day. The vast majority of comments received by staff on Election Day were complimentary of the efforts of holding the vote at the library.

In response to a few questions received as to why the election place was moved to the library, renovations to add long needed office space to the Town Office requires us to relocate our elections. The only location the Secretary of State's office would approve for the Town is in the library and that is largely tied to the ADA compliance of the new building. There has been discussion at the state level of a state holiday on election day and moving voting places to schools but that does not appear imminent.

Annual Town Meeting/June Election All items on our Annual Town Meeting warrant will be decided at the polls on Tuesday, June 11th at the Rockport Public Library. The school budgets and state ballots will be part of this election and all ballot information will be available on our town website at rockportmaine.gov once those ballots have been finalized. Absentee ballot requests for the June election will be available beginning on March 13th.

Nomination Papers for June Elections. Nomination papers are currently available for the following positions:

- 2 seats/3-year term for Select Board
- 1 seat/ 1-year term for Select Board (anticipated)
- 2 seats/3-year term Library Committee
- 1 seat/3-year term School Board
- 5 seats/3-year terms Budget Committee

The deadline to return the papers is April 12, 2024. Please collect no less than 25 and no more than 100 signatures.

Property Taxes Due. The second property tax payment is due April 16th. While we can accept tax payments at the Town Office during business hours, our online tax payment system is now live on the Town website.

Harbor:

Footbridge Update: After much research and back and forth with engineers and contractors; we have contracted with Dallas Fields of Fields Dive Service to build and install a 6' x 50' aluminum footbridge with Ipe wood decking. Our initial design proved to be too complicated to implement given our budget and timeline and the extensive engineering that the design required. It became clear that if we wanted to have a footbridge in place for this season- this is the only feasible option. We expect this replacement bridge to be in place by May 15th.

Renovations Update: The bathroom renovation is complete. Thank you to our Buildings and Grounds department crew, Matt and Glen. The improvement is major, and it was done on a tight budget. The tile floors were taken out and replaced with an epoxy floor, walls were stripped and re-painted. The shower was removed (will be replaced with an outdoor shower) and replaced with a much-needed storage area with a utility sink and employee toilet. The doors were removed (allowing full access to the laundry room) and trimmed out. New partitions, sinks, counter tops, and toilets were installed in both bathrooms. Windows in the laundry room and above the door were replaced. New lighting and improved ventilation/fans were installed.

Storm Update: We are currently producing a plan to tackle the damage from the January 10th storm. All indications are that it will be a declared event so it will be important to have detailed documentation of any work we do in-house as well as contract out.

The Harbor Committee is continuing to fine-tune the Harbor Rules and Regulations document. A final draft will be submitted to the Board for consideration at their meeting on March 11th.

Harbormaster has been working with mooring holders to complete their Online Mooring profiles and complete their transactions online. This is the first year we are not sending out paper bills so there will be more work while everyone gets used to the process of doing their renewals online. Also, Abbie is in the process of updating the Harbor section of the website.

Public Works:

While we've had only a handful of noticeable storms this winter, we've had more than one might expect where early morning icy conditions require attention to ensure school remains in session and our residents have a safe ride to work in the morning. Aside from these storms, we've been actively engaged in significant brush cutting on Main Street between Route 1 and Simonton's Corner. This is in preparation for potentially significant road work this summer to address the roadbed and drainage. Residents and motorists should expect some decent sized trees removed in the next couple of weeks on this stretch of road.

Generator Installation: With thanks to Orion Thomas of our Planning and Community Development department, we were able to secure a grant to install a generator at the public works garage. The generator will allow us to maintain heat and power in our garage so that we can continue to operate in the event of a significant power outage.

Library:

Upcoming Programs: We will be hosting some cool programs in the coming months, thanks to

the Foundation and the Friends. Here are a handful of the upcoming programs:

Ben Hatke, cartoonist and children's book illustrator.

Susan Stamberg, NPR journalist

Jonna Mendez , former technical operations officer, photo operations officer, and chief of disguise for the Central Intelligence Agency

Planetarium shows.

New Italian Language group.

We have been busy getting these big events organized. They take a lot of work and paperwork.

Past Programs: We had a Camden Conference event about the caste system in India and packed the Rockport Room. The Camden Conference team was over the moon with the turnout. Our event on birding in New England also drew a nice crowd. We got crafty/creative and had a book making workshop and a writing workshop, both events filled up and had a waitlist.

Police Department:

The police department has been assigned 1017 incidents since January 1st.

Training. Officer Bixhaku has started her first two weeks of drug recognition expert training.

Officers have stepped up patrol efforts and are on the lookout for suspicious activity after a recent complaint that a male was trying to enter a residence. We have no suspects at this time.

Hiring. We currently have three applicants for a vacant position with the Rockport Police Department. All three were administered physical assessment testing. One candidate was interviewed by staff and another is scheduled at this time. We are hoping to have a new officer on board by the beginning of summer.

Assessing:

Personal Property. A mailing went out early February to those with personal property, Assessing Clerk Rebecca Ewen is processing the responses as they come in. We will continue to process real estate transfers. While the volume of qualified sales has decreased, sales prices have not. Ratios remain lower than we'd like with a preponderance of them in the 70-85% range.

2023 Value Equalization Project. We only have one more response to go to finish responding to taxpayers' complaints after the 2023 adjustment. and have received an abatement application and are currently evaluating its merits.

Samoset Timeshares. Assessor Kerry Leichtman and Rebecca met with Samoset Timeshares representatives. At a previous meeting they had offered to give us a tour so that we might better understand the differences between units.

Legislative Update. Kerry attended a hearing at the Legislature's Appropriations Committee and spoke in support of LD 646. The \$15 million initially appropriated to reimburse towns for the ill-fated and ill-conceived stabilization bill was not nearly enough. The state was only able to reimburse us for 56% of the lost revenue, despite their promise of 100%. LD 646 would appropriate an additional \$15 million to make us whole. Not only did the committee unanimously pass the bill, but they did so as emergency legislation with an attached timetable that would put the bill on the Governor's desk by March 1 so that we will receive the reimbursement in the current fiscal year. I just received word that the bill was passed by the Legislature and is on its way to the Governor's desk.

Kerry suggested to the committee that a task force be assigned the task of researching property tax relief. Kerry has already held conversations with a couple of Legislators and a lobbyist for senior citizens about getting that started.

Kerry attended an MMA LPC meeting. Just as with the last session, bills are slowly getting printed which will make for a mess when the current session tries to conclude.

Kerry presided over a State Board of Property Tax Review hearing concerning a student housing complex in Orono serving University of Maine students. The Board found that the Town of Orono was guilty of discrimination in how the complex was taxed.

Deputy Assessor Caitlin Thompson and Kerry attended a reception for Lewiston assessor, Bill Healey. Bill was just elected VP of the IAAO. The way the organization is structured, Bill will become the organization's president-elect next year, it's president the year after and its past president the year after that. Bill is only the second Maine assessor to attain the position. It's important because the focus of his four years at the top of the organization's leadership will be making educational opportunities more affordable for smaller jurisdictions.

Fire Department:

Calls. 52 calls YTD. Several mutual aid calls to Union, Hope and Rockland for Structure Fires, 6 Car Accidents and submitted restitution for 6 of the 13 car accidents in last two months. Continuing work to obtain EMS Transport License.

West Rockport Fire Station Updates: We now have lumber on site and construction starts this week. The project remains on course for completion this fall.

For those interested in learning more about joining the fire department, please contact Chief Peasley at jpeasley@rockportmaine.gov

Opera House:

The Geoffrey C. Parker room renovations will be completed by the end of April. We are hoping to have meetings back to normal beginning in May.

Planning and Community Development:

The Planning and Development Office is gearing up for a busy Spring. We are taking a lot of calls, and meetings, with individual wanting to build, which is a good sign.

The Comprehensive Plan drafting is still ongoing with progress being made every week.

The Traffic Infrastructure Study project is nearing completion, and will be finished in May, which will be a great item for the community to consider for what would in fact work best for us in Rockport Village. This study will allow the Town to seek Federal funds to assist in covering the cost for projects suggested within the study.

The proposed ordinance amendments to be compliant with the new state statutes referred to under its bill name "LD2003," and additional amendments for clean-up purposes as well as other ordinances amendments to monitor how LD2003 will impact the community, are already proposed to the Select Board for their consideration for the June Ballot.

Civic Ready:

We encourage all residents to sign up for this, if you are interested in knowing what is happening in the Town of Rockport. What is great about this system is that you decide which types of information you receive whether it is a reminder when property taxes are due to information on an upcoming event at the Opera House or when a public works project is happening in your neighborhood; Civic Alert can keep you informed. Those interested can also sign up for alerts on our website at <https://rockportmaine.gov/civicready>

Employment Opportunities:

We have several job openings with the Town of Rockport, stop by the Town Office for an application or call and we can email you an application. Also, job applications are available on our town website, along with a detailed job description. <https://rockportmaine.gov/jobs>

All applications will be accepted until the positions are filled. The Town of Rockport is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

- **Public Works – Full-Time Truck Drivers/Equipment Operator/Laborer** - This position involves manual work in road construction, repair, and maintenance, snow and ice removal, and other seasonal public works projects. A CDL is preferred. This is a full-time year-round position.
- **Library – Part-time Library Assistant** - The Rockport Public Library is seeking a Part-time Library Assistant to join our team. Every day is an adventure at the library and you never know what new and exciting thing will happen next. We are looking for someone to join the team for between 15 to 20 hours a week with the opportunity for more. We offer competitive pay and a stimulating work environment. Some nights and weekends are required.

If you are interested in applying for the position send a cover letter and resume to Ben Blackmon at bblackmon@rockportmaine.gov

- **Police Department – Full-time Patrol Officer** - Applicants must have completed the Alert test and the Pre-Service training course of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy (MCJA). Preference may be given to applicants who have graduated from the MCJA or hold a degree in criminal justice or law enforcement. Applicants must meet age requirements as established by the Maine Criminal Justice Academy and successfully pass a physical agility test (MCJA standards), oral board, background investigation, psychological, polygraph and medical examinations.

The Town of Rockport offers a very competitive wage and benefit package. Currently they have set working schedules, working four days on and three days off. Officers with Full-time certification and 5- years' experience may qualify for a Fifteen-thousand-dollar sign on bonus, and lateral entry year for year pay and benefits.

Wastewater:

WRRF Task Force. A pair of public meetings were held this week at the Opera House to gather public input and share the results of the Task Force's work over the last year. Approximately a total of 70 people attended the two meetings. Some of the Task Force's work was shared in the last edition of the Rockport Resource as well. The Select Board will make decisions as to where this proposal will go at their meetings in March and April.

Maine Water Assistance Program. Is a federally funded program to help support eligible households in having access to drinking water and wastewater utility services. Households will be required to have water liability in order to be eligible for the drinking water/wastewater program. To receive an application, you can call 888-623-6762 or email water@mainehousing.org.

Recreation Committee:

If you want to schedule the use of a field for this year, email rockportrec@rockportmaine.gov.

Rockport Resource Newsletter:

If you would like to receive the Rockport Resource Newsletter via email you can sign up through our website.