



## Town of Rockport, Maine

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### Town Manager's Office

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## Town Manager's Report & Update November 1, 2021

### Assessing:

Our assessing office is working diligently to assist Rockport business owners in submitting the necessary information to qualify for the state's personal property tax programs, BETR and BETE. Due to the complexity of these programs, Caitlin and Molli take it upon themselves to often fill out the forms to assist our business owners. It helps the Town by providing an accurate representation of the personal property and it assists the business by dramatically reducing their cost and time.

Kerry has prepared a letter to me where he suggests working with KRT Associates to conduct a valuation update this winter. Unfortunately changes in our real estate market causes inequities in our valuations and the proportion each property owner is responsible for. Kerry's request does not take the full extent of the recent valuation changes into effect but rather puts the Town in an acceptable range where the Town can continue to receive its full state tax benefit programs such as the homestead exemption. However, it is time for the Town to consider preparing for a full town wide revaluation in the years ahead.

### Committees:

Our committees have been meeting and incorporating the new Committee Policy into their work. The agenda for this coming meeting includes three committees who have approved changes to their bylaws, and more are on the way. We are awaiting work plans from each committee which may include budget request for the coming year.

### Fire Department:

While our volunteer department is the envy of many, even we have seen a reduction in our membership. We received another new application for a junior firefighter, and hopefully others of all ages will also show interest. Chief Peasley is meeting every other week with fire chiefs to address our regional needs and to consider how a regional effort might work which takes into consideration the varied needs and strengths of Camden, Rockland, and Rockport.

### Recreation:

Due to the new middle school construction, Camden Rockport Middle School was unable to use their fields for the last two seasons. Thankfully we were able to host their games on our field at Marge Jones and we are grateful to Camden Rockport Schools for their contribution toward the

upkeep and maintenance of the field. The significant field work approved by the Board at its last meeting is scheduled to occur in two weeks, after the Pen Bay Soccer season has ended. Once again, individuals or businesses who are interested in supporting the Town's effort to restore this field to its prior pristine state can contact Chief Peasley or myself.

One note in a less positive fashion, we did have some minor damage at the field last week and as a result game cameras will be installed to protect the field from future damage.

### **Harbor:**

We are now full speed ahead in fall mode as Deputy Harbormaster Eliza Massey has ended her season. During truly turning the page on this year, the Harbor Committee has begun reviewing the 2022 mooring fees. In more positive news, the wind and rain event which hit this past week provided little to no damage to report thanks to a beneficial wind direction.

### **Library:**

Our new Children's Librarian, Charlie Gluck, has started working this month and in one of her first events, we had over 60 people at the pumpkin painting event in the park. The radiant floor heat is currently being set up and we hope to be in action soon. Due to some request from residents, it was apparent a railing is needed next to the handicap ramp. With great thanks, this project is being funded by the Friends of Rockport Public Library.

The Friends of Rockport Public Library held a book sale two weeks ago which raised \$2,000. The group's next book sale will be on December 4<sup>th</sup>.

### **Opera House:**

Our Marketing Agents Nancy Albertson and Kari Luehman are working on marketing materials for future events at the Opera House, including a new website.

### **Planning:**

Planner Orion Thomas is investigating new software solutions for the Planning and Codes department to streamline the Town's process for considering permit applications and to better interface with our residents' needs.

### **Police Department:**

The police department, in conjunction with other departments in the region, conducted a medication collection event. Over 152lbs came in from Camden and Rockport and through the entire county, over 614lbs was collected. Officer Celjeta Bixhaku is now more than halfway through her time at the state's police academy, and all our officers look forward to her return.

### **Public Works:**

Paving is nearly done for the year. If conditions allow, we hope to extend some paving on Mount Pleasant, but colder weather is clearly on the way. Currently our crew is scattered across the town cleaning up the edges of the roads, addressing driveway entrance issues, cleaning out culverts and brush cutting. Obviously, a careful eye is placed on preparing our trucks for winter weather.

**Town Clerk:**

At this point the most pressing matter in the clerk's office concerns preparations for Election Day on Tuesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>. As in recent elections, not only will the voting take place in the Richardson Room, but residents will enter and exit through that very same space rather than winding through the office, as we had in years past. As of Tuesday, we have received 267 absentee ballots which is a marked reduction from last November's over 1100 absentee ballots.

The first half of taxes were due on October 15<sup>th</sup>, and as of October 20<sup>th</sup> we had received \$5,597,398.18 in real estate collections.

**Town Office:**

Over the past, incredibly busy month, I have been taking a survey of when our residents are using our office and how. Depending upon the results of this survey of use, we may look to conduct some trials to alter hours of operation. The Rockport Town Office is open more than any other town office in the Midcoast, and the hours have been an area altered in decades. The manner in which our residents use our office has changed since the pandemic began as residents use more online services and as those services improve to allow more residents to meet their needs. More on this to come in the month ahead.

Finance Director Megan Brackett is assisting me as I review the current personnel policy in an attempt to make adjustments to ensure Rockport is able to retain and attract employees in this new labor market. I hope to have a draft for the Board to consider at your December meeting.

Lastly, an abbreviated Holiday on The Harbor event is still scheduled to take place on December 11<sup>th</sup> with details to come. However, with challenges in holding gatherings, I'd like to request of all of our residents to do what they can do to bring some light to our town as sunlight becomes scarce. We will be doing our part to put lights on the trees outside the Town Office and I hope residents all over town can join us. It may be a small thing, but all of us doing what we can make a big difference. As a pro tip... if you plan to put up some lights outside, try to do it when it is still warm enough to do so!