



Town of Rockport, Maine

Town Manager's Office

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Town Manager's Report & Update December 13, 2021

Town Office:

The most notable change in town operations over the past month is the alteration of the hours of operation. The lobby to the town office is now open 8:00 am – 4:00 pm daily. Our staff is still working until 5:00 pm and available over the phone or email, but the lobby closure at 4pm provides staff with the opportunity to complete the daily close out of the day's transactions and projects which are a challenge to complete with walk up customers. These office hours will be tested for a period of time through the slower winter months, and I expect further tested hours as the year progresses. The time change was driven from a poll of customers served after 4pm during the office's busiest transaction time of the year, from mid-September until Election Day. During that stretch of time, the walk-in traffic dropped considerably after 4pm despite the overall increased workload for the clerk's office. Thus far, the change has been received warmly as most neighboring town offices are closed well before 5:00 pm daily, so the expectation level of the public seems to be lower than the previous closing time supported. However, if any resident is challenged to meet our new lobby closing time, please contact the clerk's office to see how they can help meet your needs.

Assessing:

Last week, Assessor Kerry Leichtman oversaw the work of KRT Appraisal as they undertook the statistical update the Board discussed at their last meeting in November. Next month should see the letters distributed to our taxpayers informing them of changes to their values and providing them the opportunity to meet with Kerry to discuss these changes. Many of you may have seen recent news reports which have indicated that while the volume of sales has declined in 2021, the values have continued to increase. This reality only amplifies the Town's needs to provide this statistical update and work toward a full town wide revaluation in the years ahead.

Committees:

On this week's Select Board agenda, once again we have a series of bylaw updates from the Planning Board, C-R Pathways Committee, and the Comprehensive Plan Committee. Joining this effort is a work plan from the Ordinance Review Committee. A number of our committees, under the guidance of our department heads, have really jumped into these new requirements and are working quite hard to focus their efforts.

Fire Department:

We have had 205 calls thus far this year which puts us well ahead of last year's pace and potentially online for a new record number of calls. Of the 205 calls, the Fire department has seen an increase in the number of mutual aid EMS calls to assist North East Mobile Health Services (often to provide CPR). The department added yet another junior fire fighter which brings the total added to the department over the last few months to three junior members.

Due to the ongoing challenges with the postal service, the fire department was asked by Santa Claus to add a mailbox for letters Rockport children. We hope the mailbox will be available next week so that members of the department will assist Mr. Claus during his busy season to ensure all letters are delivered and responded to as quickly as possible.

Harbor:

Following the Halloween storm, the Harbor slowed down considerably over the month for November. The long-delayed video cameras were installed just before Thanksgiving and are working quite well.

Harbormaster Abbie Leonard will soon be available less often at the harbor as our agreement with the Town of Camden will go into effect where Abbie is share her time between the Snow Bowl and the harbor. The Town of Rockport is being reimbursed for Abbie's time leading the Ski Patrol on the mountain, but we will do our best to ensure the level of service is as high as can be expected.

Holiday on the Harbor was due to take place on Saturday the 11th, but the forecasted heavy rains have forced delaying the event until Sunday the 12th. The event is scaled back a bit due to the pandemic, but we will have many events around the harbor and hope that attendees patronize Rockport businesses which have been so generous to support this endeavor. The fireworks have been purchased and Central Maine Pyrotechnics' Donnie Heald is ready to light the fuse on the event. The trip to Big Al's to purchase the fireworks was, fittingly, a giant success so we all look forward to Sunday night where Rockport Harbor will be "The Place to Be."

Lastly, one of our local lobstermen, Danny Dodge passed away after a sudden illness late last month. Danny and his family have fished out of Rockport for decades and his mother, Marjorie, served as Rockport's first librarian for over 30 years. Danny grew up next door to me on Limerock Street and his passing came as a shock to all. Many thanks to those who assisted in removing Danny's boat from his mooring and placing it into our long-term storage (and thanks to Lynda Clancy for a wonderful recitation of those who helped). I would recommend we waive the winter storage fee for his boat to provide his family time to settle his affairs and determine next steps for his boat.

Library:

Since the opening of the new library on December 17, 2020, we have had a total circulation of over 44,000 items and total visitation is at over 33,000 individuals. Personally, those are eye popping numbers which seem to confirm what, anecdotally I have seen, our community has embraced this new space and are taking full advantage of all it has to offer Rockport.

A new handicapped ramp railing was installed in mid-November with many thanks to the Friends of Rockport Public Library. Library patrons have complimented staff for this addition to the building. In another addition to the building, new computers were installed which were purchased using funds from a Maine State Library grant.

Another successful book sale took place on November 3rd and 4th, and work has begun on a new website for the library.

Opera House:

The Opera House has one last scheduled event for the year with the Don Campbell Band's Holiday Concert on Saturday, December 18th. Tickets are available on the Town website and at the door.

It is a shame the Rockport Garden Club was unable to hold their annual Holly Berry Fair the first weekend of December, but the Garden Club has done a wonderful job providing Christmas cheer around the community with wreaths and greenery.

Planning:

Planning and Codes Department assistant Mandy Everett-Marriner resigned late last month, and we wish her well in her new endeavors. With this recent vacancy, and the accompanying shift of responsibilities to Code Officer Scott Bickford, we are no longer accepting walk-up service at the Town Office for code enforcement needs. Those who have questions or concerns for Scott, should reach him via phone and he will return your call when able. Planner Orion Thomas and I are working on determining the best course forward in filling this position.

New Height Group has nearly completed the survey they plan to circulate to residents and interested community members concerning the RES site. Postcards will be sent out to residents to inform them of this survey, and we hope to include that information in our January/February newsletter. The survey data will be synthesized and discussed at a public meeting held in early February to discuss this data and what steps forward our community wishes to take in regard to the RES property.

Police Department:

Officer Celjeta Bixhaku graduates from the Maine Justice Policy Academy on Friday, December 17th in Vassalboro Maine after 18 weeks of basic training. We are also honored to announce that Jeta has received the Randall Parsons Iron Man Award. We are so proud to have Jeta as one of our officers and we are pleased to have her return to the duty schedule so that we are once again back at full strength as a department.

Finance:

Our auditor from Smith and Associates had been scheduled to conduct our FY 2021 audit this week but due to some scheduling difficulty, this work has been postponed until January. I am hopeful to schedule a workshop for the Select Board prior to your next meeting on January 10th for 30 minutes to hear from the auditor concerning our FY 2020 audit and any recommendations the auditing firm may have for the Town. From what I understand, it has been some time since the Select Board has heard directly from the auditor.

Public Works:

Public Works has begun their snow plowing and sanding season over the last two weeks. Thankfully, we've been spared early season severe weather, but we are still responding to aftereffects from the Halloween storm.

We are continuing to pursue reimbursement from FEMA for the damage incurred from the Halloween storm event. Our initial finding of damages totaled over \$1.5 million, with approximately half of our damage surrounding the repair of Robinson Drive. Unlike previous events, FEMA is requiring far more detailed information which is quite challenging to compile. The more accurate data should allow for a more accurate depiction of what costs can be reimbursed.

Recreation:

Sports Fields of Maine completed their first round of maintenance to the Marge Jones Fields in mid-November, and the new flagpole has been ordered with many thanks to the American Legion for their assistance. We plan to place new signage on the gates to remind those parking outside the gate to park out of the way of the gate itself so that those who are working in the complex can easily enter and exit without delay.

Town Clerk:

The Town collected \$70,855.40 in excise taxes in the month of November. For those unfamiliar, the excise tax's purpose in Maine is to provide each town funding from which it can use to maintain their own roads. While we have some state funds we receive annually for the purpose of funding road maintenance, the vast majority of monies used to fund road work come from the excise tax. Last year, the Town collected \$992,473.34 from excise taxes.

All dog owners should know that dog licenses are available at the Town Office. Dog licenses are due by December 31st, but owners do have a 1-month grace period where a late fee is not assessed until February 1st. So please get your dog licensed today.

Safety:

The Town will be conducting its annual safety training event on January 11th at the Opera House. All Town employees will be asked to attend so that they can satisfy most of their required safety training for the year in one day. The Town's exemplary safety record and involvement in the Maine Bureau of Labor's SHAPE program allow the Town to pay low worker compensation rates and receive significant dividends from the MMA Property and Casualty Risk Pool annually. To save funds, we are asking our department heads and some employees to lead our training programs.

In lieu of Taxes in Recognition of services provided by the Town:

Many thanks to the following non-profit entities in Rockport who provide the town a payment in lieu of taxes as a method to fund the amount of services the town provides to that organization despite that organization not being required to pay property taxes.

Coastal Opportunities - \$400.00

Maine Media College - \$4500.00