|  |
| --- |
| **SELECTBOARD REPORT** |

2016 proved to be both challenging and productive in providing for all the needs of our community, be it roads, beach, dogs, police protection, employees, infrastructure, compliance to state regulations and of course, taxes and funding.

Eden continues to be fortunate in receiving grant funding for projects. Those completed this year include: a dry hydrant on East Hill Rd, drainage and erosion control on Cooper Hill Rd, installation of an emergency generator at the town office and Lake Eden Associations continued efforts to keep invasive species out of Lake Eden. To be completed in 2017 include the municipal planning grant to update the town plan which expires in 2018, an emergency grant for flood damage to East Hill in late June, 2016 and an AOT Structures grant for culvert #13-8 at the intersection of Knowles Flat Rd and Crooks Road.

Funds from the American Gift Fund have been utilized to cover the town share of the generator grant, provided funds for tax sale purchases in December, 2015 following the advice given at town meeting to help put delinquent tax properties back on the tax rolls. For the second year we have reduced the amount needed to be raised by taxes with funds from the Good Neighbor Fund (wind towers) when setting the annual tax rate. In anticipation of future funding needs, monies from the Selectboard Fund were transferred to the New Equipment Fund and Paving & Structures Fund.

Challenges we have faced include:

Providing adequate police coverage: Based on research of a 9 month period of 2016 Lamoille County Sheriff Dept. provided emergency response coverage to Eden when the Vermont State Police were unable, 22 times. It was brought to our attention that there is no monetary compensation for this coverage and we have contracted with Lamoille County Sheriff Dept. for emergency response coverage in the event the Vermont State Police cannot respond. The emergency response coverage is only a band aid as it does not address break-ins or other calls to the community.

Dog complaints and unlicensed dogs continue to plague our community: It is the responsibility of every dog owner to abide by state law in registering their dog and adhere to the town ordinance by keeping their pets under control and on their property. It is our hope that with dedicated personnel a town wide canvas with prompt follow up will take place in 2017.

Lake Eden Recreation Area: Management of Lake Eden Recreation Area requires a lot of time and oversight by the Selectboard and town office employees despite having onsite management. 2016 saw several issues, the worst being the injury of Manager Rick Adams one week prior to closing for the season. These prompted us to investigate our maintenance/managerial position and use of private equipment, increase the rate of seasonal campsites to a more realistic/competitive amount and upon advice of our insurance provider, tighten the rules. Bob and Jeanne Spaulding have been hired as managers for 2017. With their previous experience at managing the site we hope to have an uneventful summer.

Twin Culverts: The catastrophic collapse on October 13th caused the closure of Knowles Flat Rd. Times have changed in that strict State and ANR standards must be met meaning a 36’ bridge must be constructed at this location. At this time, we anticipate that this project will be placed on the State of Vermont priority listing. This federal program will cover 90% of the replacement cost. Although the closure is inconvenient for many, including our highway department, proceeding with replacement through the priority listing is the best financial option for Eden.

Future Funding of Infrastructure: Most of our culverts are reaching their life expectancy and need replacing. In Article 14 we are asking the voters to support an annual allocation to the Paving & Structures Fund to offset costs of not only culvert #13-8 and the twin culvert projects but others which loom on the near horizon. It is our strong opinion that a set amount each year will be provide taxpayers a more manageable tax rate than if the total cost of a project were added to the budget in any given year. Example: $40,000 vs. $750,000 added to the amount to be raised by taxes.

Support of North Hyde Park/Eden Fire Department: Funding to cover a loan to replace a fire truck ended last fiscal year. Another truck is scheduled for replacement in the near future and fire gear for personnel is continually upgraded for safety and needs replacement. Working with the North Hyde Park/Eden Fire Department and following the example of Hyde Park, Article 13 addresses establishing an equipment reserve fund which would be funded annually. These monies would be used to offset future small and large equipment purchases needed to provide adequate fire protection coverage to both the community and the men and women who volunteer.

Delinquent Taxes: 2016 saw the return of the collection of Delinquent taxes to the town office after Karen Jones relocated to Florida. Article 5 and Article 6 ask the townspeople to authorize the Selectboard to appoint this position and set its reimbursement. It is our recommendation that this position stay with the town treasurer as part of her duties, keeping the 8% penalty as town income. The 5 month period of August to December shows this to be cost effective as monies collected far exceed the cost of collection duties and other associated costs (paper supplies & postage). Furthermore, this does not take into account the funds earned and paid to Karen prior to her resignation, which would also be additional income to the town. The income from penalties would be a welcome addition to our anticipated revenue when setting the tax rate annually.

We acknowledge the importance of taking care of our dedicated and qualified employees who provide the community with the many services of our municipal government and beyond. We strive to keep our budget within a workable level but unfortunately, do not have control over outside contracted services which the community depends upon. This along with the increased demands of the public and state regulation compliance continue to make our jobs more challenging. We are grateful for the many volunteers who serve on various committees. They are a unique reflection of what makes Eden the special place it is to each of us.

Eden continues to be one of the fastest growing communities in Lamoille County and working together it is our hope to continue to be able to provide the townspeople of Eden with the services they require at a tax rate that they can afford to pay. We make every effort to do so and our actions reflect the best interest of all Eden residents.

***Ricky Morin, Chair Jubal Durivage George Sheldrick***