



# Town Manager's Report to the Town Council

Submitted by:  
Michael W. Heavener  
March 4, 2014

*Town of Winslow - In the heart of Central Maine representing People, Pride and Progress.*

## AGRICULTURAL WORKING GROUP REPORT

In the spring of 2013 the Town Council formed the Agricultural Working Group and during that same time period authorized an agreement with the Maine Farmland Trust to do the following:

- Look at town policies and procedures to make sure they are farm friendly.
- Review our land use ordinances to make sure they are farm friendly.
- Explore opportunities for conserving important farm soils that are as yet undeveloped to ensure the community's long term ability to grow food.

The working group consisted of the following members:

Sally Harwood, Chair  
Steve Russell, Town Councilor  
Kate Newkirk  
The late James Veilleux  
Elery Keene  
Severn Towl  
Stacy Benjamin, Maine Farmland Trust  
Michael Heavener, Town Manager

To better understand farming in Winslow the Group did the following:

- 1) Mailed 60 surveys to owners of farmable land. Seventeen surveys (or 28%) were returned,
- 2) Met with the Code Enforcement Officer and the Public Works Director.
- 3) Met with Stephanie Gilbert of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to discuss the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program.
- 4) Helped plan a Kennebec Region Farming Forum which was held on October 25, 2013.

## A SUMMARY OF WHAT WE LEARNED

- a) 54 parcels of land in Winslow are enrolled in the farmland current use tax program (3,300 acres). Of the parcels enrolled, 1,361 acres are designated as "pastureland" and 44 acres as "cropland". The remaining acres are mostly farm woodlands.
- b) Six of the survey respondents have their properties protected by a conservation easement, and five additional respondents indicated they are interested in protecting their land.
- c) Winslow's zoning ordinances and building codes are not overly prohibitive for farming but some improvements could be made.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Agricultural Working Group's final report is in the Council's packet. Please refer to pages 8 and 9 for the Group's recommended implementation table. I will discuss this in more detail at our March 10th Council meeting.

## MRC RESOLUTION

In the Council packet is Resolution No. 5-2014, which if approved will demonstrate our support of the MRC's efforts to continue the MRC mission by providing a regional solid waste solution beyond 2018 for the benefit of Winslow and the Charter Municipalities, including the MRC Post-2018 Planning Initiative.

Attached to the resolution is a letter Waterville City Manager Mike Roy, Town Manager Joshua Reny and I plan to sign and will include it with the approved resolutions submitted to the MRC.

## NATURAL GAS TIF DISTRICT OPPORTUNITY

The Municipal Natural Gas Advisory Committee continues to discuss how best to take advantage of the tax revenues that will be generated from the developing natural gas infrastructure. One option is to create a TIF District associated with this new infrastructure and retain 100% of the TIF funds for the town's sole use. By TIFing this new infrastructure we will shelter its value so that it will not be used to increase our County Tax or decrease our State Revenue Sharing and State Aid to Education.

Although TIF funds cannot be put in the general fund, some items currently funded through the general fund may be eligible to be funded with TIF funds. The following are some examples of projects that could be funded with TIF revenue:

- Contract with Efficiency Maine or similar organization to provide additional financial assistance to businesses for energy efficiency and conversions.
- "Buy down" the cost of natural gas for businesses.
- Help fund the KV Gas District.
- Expand and capitalize Central Maine Growth Council into a more robust/effective organization.
- Economic development projects (business parks, roads, utilities, etc; marketing/business attraction; RLF/grant programs; acquisition/demolition/urban renewal; etc).
- Feasibility study and financing for cogeneration facility.
- "New Economy" technology and education center for workforce development.
- Public safety improvements (including Fire Stations) made necessary by the establishment of the district.

Judy Mathiau, our Assessor, estimates the NG pipeline in Winslow could have a value of

around 4.5 million, which equates to \$69,750 in tax revenue, if using a tax rate of \$15.50.

At this point I am recommending that we form a TIF District related to the NG infrastructure. If we change our minds later we can always dissolve this district and restore the revenue to the general fund. We can discuss this further at our meeting on the 10th.

## SEBASTICOOK RIVER LAND

After the removal of the Fort Halifax Dam, approximately 8 parcels of land emerged for which the owners were unknown (see *attached list*). Our Assessor attempted to determine the owners without success. She then followed State Statute and advertised the assessment of the parcels in the newspaper.

While I was recently reviewing the property tax foreclosure procedure for these parcels I discovered that I should have advertised all of the lien notices and foreclosure notices in the newspaper. The statute also requires me to send copies of the lien and foreclosure notices by certified mail to all of the abutters.

I contacted Town Attorney William Lee and discussed the matter with him. Attorney Lee suggested that a more thorough title search would need to be done before we could proceed with the lien and foreclosure process. He surmised the cost per parcel could be hundreds or more for each parcel to do an acceptable title search.

After considering the potential costs for performing title searches and conducting proper notifications, I have concluded the cost outweighs the benefit of properly foreclosing on these parcels.

Therefore, if the abutters are willing, I recommend that we convey all of our interest in these parcels to the abutters at no cost to the abutters. We can then tax the abutters for the parcels and after 20 years the abutters will have the right to claim ownership.

### TAX ACQUIRED PROPERTY

On Friday, February 14, 2014, we foreclosed on 16 properties for non payment of property taxes (*see attached list*). The total unpaid taxes for all the properties comes to \$32,772. On February 28th I sent a notice to all of the former property owners informing them they have 90 days to reacquire their property from the town. To reacquire their property they will need to pay all unpaid taxes plus 1 year of anticipated taxes. The deadline for payment is May 29th.

### EFFECIENCY MAINE GRANT

I currently serve as the President of the Sustain Mid Maine Coalition and Mike Roy serves as the Vice-President. A few years ago the Coalition partnered with the City of Waterville and the Town of Winslow and obtained a grant from Efficiency Maine to fund a home energy improvement project in both communities. At the time the City of Waterville served as fiscal agent for the grant.

Waterville, Winslow, Fairfield and the Sustain Mid Maine Coalition are now collaborating to submit a grant request to Efficiency Maine to deliver coordinated home energy retrofit education and outreach efforts to home owners. These education efforts may include, but are not limited to, educating homeowners about building science and home energy principles, home energy retrofit projects, and home energy retrofit incentives from Efficiency Maine.

I have agreed for Winslow to be the fiscal agent for this grant. There will be no cost to the town and will only involve my time.

### POLICE CHIEF INTERVIEW COMMITTEE

The deadline for applications for our Police Chief position is Monday, March 10. As of March 4th we have received 33 applications. The Interview Committee consists of the following individuals:

Gerald Saint Amand, Town Council Chair

Kenneth Fletcher, Town Councilor

Sally Harwood, Winslow Resident/Business Owner

Peter Drapeau, Winslow Resident/Business Owner

Peter Lizanecz, Investigator for the Maine Attorney General's Office/ Former Police Chief

Michael Heavener, Town Manager

I expect to begin interviewing candidates the week of March 17th. I am hopeful I will have a recommendation to present to the Council at the April 14th Council meeting.