

**Colchester's Weekly Town News**  
For the Week of August 18, 2014

**While by no means a total representation of all the work performed by the Town, the following information highlights some activities which occurred:**

**Town Manager's Office—Dawn Francis, Town Manager**

This week, I wish to clarify some conclusions reached by a reporter in an article that appeared in last week's Colchester Sun regarding my involvement in a recent meeting of school and municipal officials around education funding. My participation was driven by a desire of the Selectboard on behalf of our taxpayers to create an awareness of issues surrounding municipal and school funding as it relates to the property tax and to generate ideas for policy makers to consider as we develop options to our growing reliance on the property tax to fund education. I emphasized to the reporter that we are all in this together, it is not schools versus towns and the current path we are on is unsustainable when one considers past and future trends. The solution will lie in a comprehensive approach in which the educational community and municipal officials all work together with stakeholders and policy makers. In fact, our keynote speaker, Bill Shubart, spoke of the need for municipalities to consolidate various services and to work with the schools on shared services as a cost containment measure.

Furthermore, the reporter indicated that I am in "the forefront of a lobbying effort to change state laws." While I may have been a lobbyist in a past career, as a Town Manager, I cannot and will not be part of a lobbying effort. The purpose of the meeting was to gather together municipal and school officials to understand the facts and trends around rising costs, to understand some of the mandates that the education system must factor in, and to work collaboratively and in a non-partisan manner to formulate constructive ideas. The presentations from the day and the ideas generated can be found here.

<http://www.vlct.org/advocacy/conference-on-education-property-tax-and-funding-reform/>

For more information about the Town Manager's Office, please visit <http://colchestervt.gov/Manager/index.shtml> or call (802) 264-5509.

**Assessor's Office—Bob Vickery, Assessor**

The Assessor's Office has lodged the Fiscal Year 2015 Grand List (GL) in the Colchester Town Clerk's office.

- The Assessor's Office has been busy working on the State Equalization Study to ensure that Colchester residents do not pay more than their fair share of the State Education Tax.
- The Office has been working on Errors and Omissions for Select Board's approval and making the necessary corrections to the Grand List.

For further information or comment, please call Linda Kingston at 264-5509.

- The Board of Civil Authority had 6 assessment appeals from the 2014 Grand List. They have rendered their decisions and The Assessor's Office has been making the necessary corrections to the Grand List.

If you have any questions please call the Assessor's Office.

For more information about the Assessor's Department, please visit <http://colchestervt.gov/Assessor/assessorHome.shtml> or call (802) 264-5670.

### **Town Clerk's Office—Karen Richard, Town Clerk**

Taxes were Due August 15<sup>th</sup>

- Kudos to the taxpayers in Colchester! We were scheduled to collect \$13,638,038 for the August installment. The amount collected was \$12,725,090, which included \$735,720 toward future installments. We continue to have a low delinquency rate which strengthens our position when we need to bond or borrow.

Election August 26th - District 9-2 polling location moved to Malletts Bay School

- There is a state primary election on August 26th. Due to a conflict at the high school the polling location for District 9-2 will be moved to Malletts Bay School on Blakely Road. The polling location for District 9-1 is the same: Colchester Meeting House on Main St.
- Since it is a state primary election you will be given four ballots for your district, one ballot for each major party. You do not have to declare a party. You will vote one ballot and deposit 3 ballots into the box for "unused ballots." If you are requesting the ballots to be mailed to you the process is the same. You will be mailed four ballots. You will vote one ballot and deposit the three blank ballots into an envelope marked "unused ballots." You must return all ballots; the voted ballot is in one envelope and the 3 blank ballots into another envelope. Please visit <http://www.colchestervt.gov/TownClerk/townClerkElections.shtml> to view the Warning and ballots for each district.

Charter Changes on November Ballot

- I have been proactive in suggesting Charter changes that will be voted on in November. One article is the change of the Town Clerk/Treasurer position from an elected to appointed Town Clerk and Town Treasurer. Since 1998 when I was first elected the office has transitioned from a manual paper process to an electronic process. In the past we billed and collected taxes. We are now sending electronic files to escrow companies and debiting taxpayer accounts for taxes that are due. We scan and electronically file all land records and maps that are received. It is time for the position to require professional experience and qualifications. The office should have oversight and be held to the same standards as other departments.
- The other change I have advocated for is the reduction in the penalty rate for delinquent taxes. So many people are caught with a onetime dilemma of being late. The 8% penalty is harsh for being late

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one time. The Charter change will reduce the penalty to 5% for the first 30 days and then the additional 3% will be applied if the installment is still delinquent.

The list of Charter changes is available in the Clerk's office for your convenience. Please attend the public hearings on the Charter changes that are being held on September 16th at the Colchester Meeting House and September 23rd in the Pomerleau Conference Room at St. Michael's College or email me or the Selectboard with your input.

For more information about the Town Clerk's Office, visit <http://colchestervt.gov/TownClerk/townClerkHome.shtml> or call (802) 264-5520

#### **Finance Department—Aaron Frank, Assistant Town Manager/CFO**

- Monthly financial report summary: after one month, we are on budget on expenses and on budget on revenues.
- Worked out an agreement with the Town of Essex to obtain property assessment services under contract, creating a flexible non-employee arrangement.
- Made a proposal to the Selectboard to authorize the Town to expand our public safety dispatch operation to serve the City of Winooski, should the City choose to contract with the Town. This contract would allow the Town to provide additional dispatch coverage at no cost to Town residents.
- Evaluated wireless need and usage vs. plans, and participated in a joint procurement. Changed plans resulting in a \$1,000 annual savings.
- Began preparation of documents and financial information for the FY 14 Audit. The Town of Colchester receives an annual outside audit with auditors reporting directly to the Selectboard.

For more information about the Finance Department, please visit <http://colchestervt.gov/Finance/financeHome.shtml> or call (802) 264-5650.

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