



Town of Winchester

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Dear Town Meeting Members,

On behalf of the Select Board, please accept this report highlighting some of the ongoing work and new initiatives of the town.

Since last we met, we have seen more activity return to sports fields and the town center, and the school year has gotten under way with in-person learning. The COVID pandemic and its Delta variant persist, but the Health Department reports the town has a high vaccination rate and low infection rate currently. We all appreciate the continued vigilant efforts by our healthcare community and town staff to help keep everyone safe.

This summer, the Winchester Town Day Committee organized both a “Mini Town Day” on June 5th, to coincide with the high school graduation, as well as a full-scale Town Day in September — complete with fireworks.

In the town center, the Conservation Commission worked over the summer on controlling overgrown and invasive-species vegetation along Aberjona River and Mill Pond behind the library, as part of the ongoing Aberjona Initiative. In a collaborative project between the Chamber of Commerce, Town Engineering Department and DPW, landscaping and other improvements along the Aberjona River between the Main Street and Waterfield bridges are also in the works, along with consideration of improvements in pedestrian and bike safety, traffic calming, and parking management downtown during the MBTA station project and other construction.

As we start this town meeting, construction and road work seem almost everywhere. Work continues on the Swanton Street Bridge flood mitigation project. Although delayed due to July’s record-setting rainfall level, this work is slated for completion by mid-November. Building permits have been issued for affordable housing developments at 416 Cambridge Street and 19-35 River Street. Cambridge Street received a permit in 2016, which has been upheld after a long appeal process. The River Street project was permitted in 2019, and, together with state approval of the town’s Housing Production Plan, allowed Winchester to enter a two-year “safe harbor” status under the 40B law, when the town can choose not to allow an unwanted 40B application. To stay in safe harbor, the town needs to add 40 new affordable units for a one-year extension or 79 units to extend two years.

At this Town Meeting the Select Board seeks to move forward with the Housing Production Plan by asking to increase the authorized amount to acquire the property at Washington and Swanton Streets for redevelopment into a mixed-income residential complex. Based on new information learned since Town Meeting considered this last year, the current property value is

\$5.3 million. The Select Board's overall plan is still to identify a qualified developer and well-designed project proposal through the public bidding process and to then sell the property for redevelopment expeditiously. (Article 9)

After much study and discussion, the Board is also presenting a proposal for critical repairs and operational upgrades to the Transfer Station. The plan includes removal of the defunct incinerator building and related environmental remediation, relocation of the main electrical service, urgent repairs to the conveyor belt and tipping building, improvements to recycling and food-waste areas, and long-needed dedicated space for employee offices and restrooms. (Article 14)

The town's investment in flood mitigation plan projects along the Aberjona River began in the 1990s. One of the early, larger projects was widening the channel along Mystic Valley Parkway between Waterfield and Manchester Roads completed in 2012. Substantial vegetation growth on the sloping channel banks is beyond the DPW's typical landscaping maintenance program. The Town Manager seeks funding for an engineering study to do tree/vegetation identification/tagging, prepare an Invasive Species Control Plan and related work in order to apply for applicable permits. (Article 27)

As the Recreation Department works to re-establish programming post-pandemic, it has identified a renovation/improvement project to upgrade the badly deteriorated asphalt outdoor play area at Mystic School with a multi-sport court designed for basketball, volleyball, street hockey, pickle-ball and tennis programs. This re-designed sports court would support after-school programs and other revenue-generating activities and also be a play-space for neighborhood children. The Select Board seeks funding for the preliminary engineering/design services. (Article 26)

In closing, I want to acknowledge the superlative effort and collaboration of town staff over these months carrying out the many projects and town operations while planning for this third virtual town meeting. As always, it is very much a team effort. THANK YOU.

And thank you, town meeting members, for your service.

WINCHESTER SELECT BOARD

By: Susan Verdicchio, Chair