

Selectboard Report for 2009

Board Change: Ripton's Selectboard saw its first change in many years when Bill Ford submitted his resignation, effective September 1. Bill had served on the Board and as its Chair for 23 ½ years, a probable record. Richard Collitt was appointed to fill out the remainder of the term. The Board would like to thank Bill for his many years of service to the Town.

Paying for the 2008 Flood: Fortunately, 2009 was kinder to Ripton than 2008. While we continued to have some damaging storms, nothing remotely rose to the level of the previous year's flooding. At the end of 2008, we had a short term loan with the National Bank of Middlebury to cover our road repairs from the flooding. Most of this was paid off by FEMA and State reimbursements, as well as by some property owners who live on private roads. To address the remainder, voters at Town Meeting authorized the Selectboard to bond up to \$400,000 over 10 years to repay the balance. By the time the actual application had to be in, we were able to determine the need to only bond for \$275,000. Some further reimbursements have left us with about \$20,000 for which we bonded but ended up not needing. We are asking voters to put this sum in an escrow account to reduce the first five years' payments, since those are the larger payments. This should mitigate the cost to taxpayers a bit, and keep the money going towards that for which it was intended: paying off the flood repairs debt.

Private Road Flood Follow-up: The Board suggests that residents living on private roads create an agreement addressing how repairs will be handled in the event of a major wash-out or similar incident. The Town was only able to help out in the 2008 events because the total damage rose to a level where the Governor could ask to have the area declared a disaster. There also were several property owners who were unable to be contacted in a timely manner, so work was done without their agreement to pay their share. Having a plan in place *before* a disaster could benefit all parties.

Flood Mitigation Project – The Town has received grant funding from FEMA and from the State's Clean and Clear initiative that will be used to hopefully mitigate future flooding in the Town's center. Two informational meetings were held to keep town residents informed. The bank towards Route 125 will be armored with large boulders, and

floodplains and a flood chute will be developed to slow the water during a flood as well as to encourage it to flow away from the highway and buildings. This project is slated to take place mid-summer 2010.

Community House: The structural integrity of this building was surveyed and found to be in good shape. Some minor repairs have been made during the year, and we hope to have the building's exterior painted this summer. Our insurance carrier has notified us that we are not fully covered for liability when the building is rented for a private event, and that renters should provide insurance coverage. We have looked into this and find that most homeowners' policies will cover your use of this building at no additional cost. If you do not have such a policy, there are programs that provide coverage for single events. The cost varies depending on the type of event, number of people, and – significantly – if alcohol is served. We have been working on a new contract for many months, and will be using it starting this spring. The insurance requirement will be a part of it. Our intention is not to make the building inaccessible, but we do need to protect the building as well as the Town.

Town Office: This building was painted during the summer and has had some minor repairs completed, as well as the replacement of a failed water heater with a small, efficient one. Some needed work on the building will be done this year, including interior painting, carpet replacement and new storm windows. There may also be some grant funding that will allow us to improve the entrance to the building, making it more accessible to people with disabilities. Bill Pierce continues as the facilities manager, and he is helping us keep up with maintenance and needed repairs for both Town buildings.

Stop Sign Ordinance: While Ripton has had multiple stop signs for many years, the Town never had an ordinance that required vehicles to stop at those signs. Addison County's Sheriff Coons informed the Board that his officers were not able to issue citations when people failed to observe these signs. We passed an ordinance in the fall of 2009 requiring vehicles to stop at stop signs and allowing drivers to be cited and fined if they do not.

Zoning By-Law: We held a public hearing for the Zoning Board's proposed Fluvial Erosion

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Hazard Zoning Bylaw and then the Selectboard passed the bylaw. It now complements the Town's zoning plan.

National Forest: TARP (the federal Troubled Assets Relief Program) monies channeled through the U.S. Forest Service will provide the Town with \$39,700 for work to be done on the Goshen, Steam Mill, and Brooks Roads. They are also working with the State to rebuild the first bridge on the Goshen Road this summer, improving it structurally and widening it. We again received full funding from them for the lands they hold in Ripton: \$52,043.

Middlebury College: Under the terms of the Town's agreement with the College, the Town was paid \$56,177 as a gift-in-lieu of taxes and \$20,098 in direct taxes, as well as a gift-in-kind amount of \$16,000 in goods, services and cash. There is a full accounting of the College gift-in-kind later in this report.

Auditing: Angolano & Company audited the Town's financial records on January 15, 2010, and their certifying letter is included in this report. Ripton Elementary School was audited by the same firm in October, 2009. As established in January, 2005, the Town has agreed to pay for both School and Town audits out of the General Fund. Copies of the complete audit reports are available for review at the Town Office.

ROADS AND BRIDGES

After the floods of 2008 we returned to routine road maintenance this year.

Better Backroads: The Town received a Better Backroads Grant for stopping erosion on a section of Wagon Wheel Road. Work was completed in October at a total cost of \$9,949, with a \$7,000 grant award applied to the cost. We have applied for but not yet received conditional approval for a Better Backroads Grant in 2010 for Pearl Lee Road.

Grants: The Town continues to consider all appropriate grants. The U.S. Forest Service, as part of the Forest Road Agreement, has awarded Ripton \$39,700 for repair work to be done on the Goshen

Road (areas not damaged during flooding of 2008), Steam Mill Road and Forest Road 92 (off Goshen Road).

General Culvert Work: After the flood damage and replacing approximately 30 culverts in 2008, Ripton has returned to the normal schedule. The Selectboard continues to gradually replace old, undersized steel culverts with corrugated plastic ones that neither rust nor rot, and are easier to de-ice. In 2009 three culverts were replaced, two on County Crossroad and one on Lincoln Road with a total cost of \$3749. The budget for 2010 has been held level at \$5,000.

Paving: In 2009 a section of the Lincoln-Ripton Road (1,400 linear feet) was paved at a cost of \$10,980. The budgeted amount for paving in 2010 is \$12,500.

Gravel Roads: The Board continues to build up the gravel base of our unpaved roads through the Summer Gravel Project. Last year we spent \$16,577 on this effort, and have budgeted \$15,000 for 2010.

Extensive Ditch Cleaning and Maintenance: The drainage ditches along County Crossroad were cleaned this past summer as were a number of different areas along North Branch Road.

Winter Work: This winter did not start as early as it has in the past couple of years which may be a positive for salt and sand purchases. A severe wind storm the second week of December 2009 brought down many trees and power lines. The final clean-up of these trees will continue this spring.

Class 4 Roads Plowing: We continued to follow the policy for the independent plowing of Class 4 roads. If such plowing needs to take place, there is a procedure that must be followed. Contact the Board Clerk if there are any questions.

Right-of-Way Mowing: Extended mowing within the Town's right-of-way was completed this year on all paved roads. This will be continued around town on a 4-year cycle, keeping the brush to a manageable level and reducing the need for cutting with a saw. This year mowing was done on the Robbins Cross Road, Chandler Hill Road and Frost Road.

Selectboard Budget Narrative for 2009

GENERAL FUND AND ROAD BUDGET

Financial Status: 2009 ended with a total combined fund balance of \$290,338 compared with \$61,904 at the end of 2008. The summary of these funds can be seen on the balance sheets that follow.

General Fund Expenses in 2009: We under spent the general fund budget by about \$20,000. This was largely due to paying less interest than anticipated on the bank loan which initially covered the cost of road repairs from the 2008 flooding, prior to our bonding for this money. Recycling costs went down due to a rate change in our favor. Since fuel costs abated to some degree, the heating of Town buildings took less of a toll, while efficiency measures undertaken for lighting have continued to show significant savings (down by over \$200 for each building since the highest figures in 2004 and 2005).

Although overall expenses were less than anticipated, there were some specific budget lines that were overspent. The Board made the decision to pay retiring Selectman Bill Ford his full stipend for the year in deference to his 23½ years of service as Chair of the Selectboard (served 9 months in 2009). We also voted to increase the hours authorized for the Board Clerk, particularly due to the extra work brought about by the FEMA paperwork that resulted from the flooding. Legal services again exceeded our estimate, and we paid for two years' worth of generator repairs within the current fiscal year in order to take advantage of a discount. While Community House maintenance and repairs came in \$942 over budget, Facilities management was under budget by \$2,865.

This year completed the accounting of our expenses and reimbursements from the summer of 2008 flooding. We were able to receive a 10 year bond for the remaining balance and paid off our line of credit with the National Bank of Middlebury. We made the final payment on the Fire Department's tanker truck. The Town Office building was painted on its exterior.

Road Expenses in 2009: The costs involved in clearing and repairing roads during and after storms continues to be difficult to predict, and line items relating to that work tended to run high. This was

balanced out by some savings or just spending less in other areas, so overall the road budget was under spent by \$385.

General Fund Expenses for 2010: It is difficult to compare the totals of the proposed budget with that of last year, since 2009 included the total costs of paying back the loan to cover flood damage. Two areas are primarily responsible for increases. One is our first payment to the bond bank for the flood costs. This will be the most costly year, and that payment is \$37,214. The actual burden to taxpayers will be reduced by \$4,000 if voters approve putting the amount over-borrowed into an escrow account paid towards the bond every year for five years. See a fuller explanation of this in the Selectboard Report under "Paying for the 2008 Flood". Additionally, we are planning to paint the exterior of the Community House at a projected cost of \$30,000. We will be putting an additional \$2,500 towards document preservation for the next two years to get all of the Town's vital records preserved. The cost of property insurance has gone up, and we determined to set the budget for legal fees closer to what it has actually been running.

Road Expenses for 2010: Last year the road budget was reduced to offset the costs related to the flooding repairs. This year we put in a modest increase - an additional \$2,500 - for resurfacing. Other areas of increase are in grading, sanding and plowing to more closely match what has actually been needed to handle the results of our weather. We are anticipating a Better Backroads grant of \$12,500, \$2,500 of which is our required match.

Laureen Cox, Chair
Ronald Wimett
Richard Collitt

Selectboard for the Town of Ripton