

February 15, 2010

TO: Redding Residents:

We are keenly aware that economic times require scrutiny of every expenditure, both big and small, in order to keep costs as low as possible. This challenge is familiar, because we have approached every budget for the past several years in this manner. Two years ago the actual increase in the Board of Selectmen budget was limited to 1.3% and last year's actual increase was even less: .3% . Our budget responsibility starts with the preparation of the budget and continues all year as we monitor and try to control spending further.

There are some really good ideas for cost savings out there, and many of them we are already doing. We fully embraced the concept of regional purchasing several years ago, when we were one of the first towns in our region to join the Capitol Region's purchasing consortium. We still belong, and take advantage of the bids they receive, or the state receives, whichever is lower. We also belong to a large, multi-town buying consortium for fuel oil, gasoline, and diesel, but are also willing to entertain bids from local firms if they are able to provide the needed products at an even lower cost.

We also embraced the concept of regional cost sharing close to twenty years ago when we entered into a three town contract for paramedic services. We continue in a two town contract with Bethel, which provides the level of service we need at a fraction of the cost we would pay on our own.

I am very pleased to report that efforts are progressing in our attempts to explore other regional initiatives. The First Selectmen from 5 other towns joined me and our Police Chief for a second meeting on regionalizing our dispatch centers. We are the lead town, as we applied for and received federal funding to purchase the equipment. The installation is complete and now we are ready to find the most cost efficient way to use it.

We are proceeding with plans to have a 4 town regional Animal Control program. Preliminary thinking indicates that we could improve service and reduce costs for all towns with such an arrangement. The Chief Elected Officials for the 4 towns have issued a mandate to our Police Chiefs to develop an operational plan, which should go into effect as soon as possible.

Job sharing has also been recommended, and this, too, we have been doing for years. Our Health and Zoning departments share one administrative assistant, as do Conservation and Planning. Unlike most police departments, ours does not have a records clerk. Our Animal Control Officer also handles parking enforcement at the train station and is cross trained in traffic control to assist when needed when he is on duty. Two transfer station employees double as our building custodians one day a week, and one Town Hall employee is split between the Tax Collector, Town Clerk, and Water Pollution Control Commission. Town Hall's public hours have historically been open 32.5 hours per week, but those are the working hours for less than a dozen clerical hourly employees. The overwhelming majority work a minimum of 40 hours per week. Half of our town governmental employment is covered by union contracts. This poses some short term and long term challenges. Short term, I have reached out to our three union presidents requesting a meeting where we can share ideas for cost savings in this next budget year. Longer term, all three contracts will be up for negotiation over the next two years and the current economic climate will certainly be the backdrop for future contracts. All employee insurance co-pays continue to increase on an annual basis.

The Controller is meeting next week with our Highway Superintendent and Park & Rec Director and their counterparts in Newtown to explore shared equipment purchasing and, with interest rates so low, he is also looking into leasing equipment, to see if that makes economic sense. The Controller has also reached out to

the Business Director of our school system to explore cooperative ventures that could save money and make sense.

No where yet in discussions have I seen any suggestions for additional revenue streams. We do have one new revenue source to look toward in the future, as we have successfully completed negotiations with ATT for a flagpole cell tower at the Highway Garage. Once that is approved by the Siting Council, and fully operational, it will provide us an additional \$50,000 per year.

I hope this gives the public a better sense of our willingness to consider and implement cost saving measures wherever they are possible. We have done so repeatedly in the past as proven by the historical downward trend of our increases...less than half that of the Consumer Price Index.

Natalie Ketcham
First Selectman