

Coordinator report May 2004 – David Young

The Town Meeting is May 6th, and the town election is May 20th. There is going to be a pre-town meeting that is also known as the Finance Committee Hearing on April 29th, and I mention it on the chance that the electronic newsletter might be out by then. The Town Meeting will occur at the town hall for the first time in several years. That preliminary meeting a week prior is scheduled for the school. Both are at 7:00 pm.

There is a big-ticket item under consideration, a new fire engine. It proposes to replace the 1985 GMC. The apparatus that Chief Larson is proposing is not a custom truck which lowers the total cost to a staggering \$680,000. And the Chief thinks this will be 30-year property. The candidate for replacement served us 40 years. If the town decides to buy one now, we propose borrowing \$480,000 and transferring \$200,000 from the town's savings, the stabilization account. This is a five-year property with respect to a loan term. We are modeling for 5% interest. That means that this will cost about a dollar on the tax rate for five years. A rule of thumb is that every \$115k in spending is a dollar on the tax rate. A companion action is required, that is a voted debt exclusion override. It excludes payments for the truck from the tax levy limit and allows taxes to be increased, but only until this item is paid off.

The Finance Committee is not recommending this truck purchase and the Selectboard is. I am troubled. To have this kind of investment made without the framework of a capital plan to consider all our needs for highway truck, etcetera is risky. On the other hand, we recently bought a new cruiser and a 7-passenger school bus absent a capital plan. Do we have other options? Should we consider refurbishing the truck for half the price? Should we commit to making repairs to an existing truck and make upgrades, but how much will that cost and could some of that expense be instead offsetting the payoff of a new truck. I expect that by meeting time we will have a better understanding of the rating system and how it affects insurance costs because some of this increased cost to acquire a truck could be offset by savings on your homeowner's insurance. We will just have to see.

The budget you will consider at the town meeting is up almost 9%. It reflects our increased costs for fuel, electricity, for health and other insurance. While most of the town's costs are up seven to eight percent the proposed budget provides 3.2% wage increases for town employees who are themselves meeting higher costs for all the same things. You know it. You are living it. The Finance Committee will have written explanations and recommendations for the meetings.

Nationally, statewide, and locally there is a recognized housing shortage. An accessory dwelling unit, an ADU is allowed under our zoning and the Planning Board has an amendment to remove the requirement for additional acreage. This should be an effective way for us to increase our housing stock and to rationalize it, to make it more correctly sized for the fact that so many of us are living alone in larger homes than we need. This can become a financial burden.

I have been advising residents get the Charter Spectrum cable installed while it is free to get installed. Today I had a conversation with the higher up who said that they are not extremely interested in installing what I would call cold drops, installations that do not have a paying customer on the end. They represented that there is not a danger of having to write a large check for an installation in the future unless it exceeds the distance, they are willing to go from the street. If

that is, you with a long run to the street I would not chance it. Get it installed and then cancel it. I will report back when I have the assurance in writing that those who the new install passed by will not have a surprise. This is happening in towns but not Chater / Spectrum ones. Meanwhile, Warwick Broadband has lost about a third of its customers. Most have been folks whose service was less than stellar. The result is our operating costs for repairs in the last few months have been reduced drastically. Folks do need to contact us when they want to end their service. 413-676-9544. We are just not sophisticated enough to be able to tell that you are not using it. Note we do not bill for partial months so if you used service during the month you owe us. And it is going to get a little crazy over the next six weeks because the bookkeeper is on a break. Warwick Broadband customers will not get a bill for June. Please pay for it anyway. And note we will not be able to correct billing until Jim gets back from his trek, so I am keeping a list.