

Selectmen's 2015-2016  
Budget Message

The proposed 2015-2016 Board of Selectmen's Budget reflects a significant amount of work and effort from all of the various departments and agencies in Town. Because of everyone's efforts, the General Government Budget is only \$2,638 or .2% above the current year budget. This small bottom line increase was achieved by reallocating funds from various accounts to areas where increases were needed. Although the spending side of the Town budget basically is not changing, State revenues to the Town are projected to decrease this year on both the Town side and the Board of Education. During this budget process, Town departments were asked to keep their budgets as close to this year's budget amounts as possible and try to reallocate funds to areas of need. Most likely the actual State Revenue dollars provided to the Town will not be known until after our Town Budget is passed.

As you might know, the State is in a very difficult financial situation. The project budget deficit for this current year now stands at \$190 million dollars. The preliminary budgeted revenue numbers for Voluntown reflect decreases in estimated State Funding from the PILOT Program and the Mashantucket Pequot Fund. Consequently, as State funding continues to decrease, local taxpayers will need to fund more of the tax burden.

The Town will undergo property revaluation in 2015. Preliminary work on this project has begun but the bulk of the work will be done after July. The proposed budget has \$28,000 budgeted for this process. In the Selectmen's Budget, there are few new line items. In the Transfers Out Section, a roll over fund for the maintenance of the Wylie School Historic Building has been created with an initial funding of \$2,000. These funds can only be used for work on the Wylie School House Historic Building. Any unused funds will "rollover" and remain in the account. The Town will be celebrating its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary in few years. A rollover account has been established to begin setting funds aside for this celebration. The initial funding of this Tercentennial account is \$1,500. In response to the severe power outages that the State has experienced in recent years due to falling trees during high wind storms (blizzards and hurricanes), the State has established new requirements for a Municipal Tree Warden. DEEP approved course and training are now required along with specific duties and job responsibilities. An annual amount of \$1,500 has been budgeted for this. The largest area of expense increase in the Selectmen's Budget is in the area of Information Technology or Data Processing. The Town does not have an IT professional on staff and contracts out for IT Services. The Town's servers, computers, software, and security are old and below acceptable standards. Upgrading these items is a necessity.

The past winter was extremely difficult and it depleted our Snow Removal Fund. The snow removal account in the proposed budget is underfunded and will not adequately meet next year's snow removal needs. In order to minimize the tax increase burden, the Selectmen intend to augment the snow

removal fund with money from Town Aid Roads. This will result in deferring some road maintenance in the coming year. This tactic is a short term fix and cannot be used in subsequent years.

This budget does not have any new programs proposed and it meets the basic needs of the Town while being mindful of the difficult economic times that the Town still faces.

Proposed legislation for PILOT Reform is in the Legislature in this current session. It is important that Voluntown does not get short changed by any legislation that might get passed. The amount of funding that Voluntown receives from the State for payment in lieu of taxes related to the Pachaug State Forest is insufficient and needs to be increased.

A few months ago the Town voted to proceed with replacing and repairing the roof on the Voluntown Elementary School. The Town's portion of this expense could be \$440,000 and will come equally from the capital nonrecurring account and undesignated fund. It is hoped that the bid process will yield favorable results, thereby minimizing the Town's portion of the expense.

The Town also received a STEAP grant in the amount of \$500,000 to be used towards the construction of a Town Garage. Other necessary capital projects that the Town will face in the not too distant future include a new fire truck, replacement of the Forge Hill Bridge, and a potential Library expansion. There are several other smaller projects that need to be considered as well. These include a Town Pavilion, new stairs going from the Voluntown Elementary School to Constitution Field, a Community Center, and new Public Works vehicles. It is necessary that the Town have a plan in place to meet these financial needs.

Bob Sirpenski  
First Selectman