

Municipal Corner – Public Works

The Town is advertising for an Assistant Town Engineer. Although a new title, this is not a new tax payer supported position. It is a vacancy being filled. The person who previously held the former Public Works Project Manager position did an excellent job and has been promoted and transferred to the serve as Assistant Public Works Director/Water Superintendent. The Water Department is paying for this position through rates.

The Public Works Department oversees the Town's Water, Sewer, and Highway Departments and is responsible for the operations of these systems. It is also responsible for the development and implementation of the Town's capital projects. The Town has undertaken several large capital projects in recent years and more are being planned for the future. These have included the significant expansion of the wastewater treatment plant and sewer collection system including the 2 additional sewer pumping stations. The water system expanded from a single source of supply without treatment or pumps and a Village distribution system to a system with 2 sources of supply, a treatment plant, 11 pumping stations, 9 storage reservoirs and 18 miles of distributions system. We also supply water and undertake various levels of operational responsibility for 5 consecutive systems (private systems supplied by and connected to our system). Our water and sewer systems are no longer small village systems. They are complicated and more akin to those of a small city. There are also numerous and challenging legacy issues. These expansions and increased operational responsibility was done without adding additional staff in the Water Department until the former Public Works Project Manager was transferred to the Water Department last fall.

In addition, environmental regulatory requirements and mandates are constantly increasing. Legislation has been recently adopted and others are under active consideration as a result of federal mandates that will increase storm water discharge and road maintenance requirements, wastewater system discharge standards and water quality monitoring requirements. In addition, regulatory agencies are requiring more to assure compliance with State and Federal standards. When you read or hear about the issues associated with the clean-up of Lake Champlain, know that new municipal requirements will directly increase the operational responsibilities and costs of Public Works.

Public Works is also spending more time than it has historically drafting development agreements to ensure a common understanding of what infrastructure is being proposed to be turned over to the municipality, that it is designed well, and the beneficiary pays all associated cost. They are also conducting more inspections during construction to ensure it is built as intended. In addition, Public Works has taken the lead in developing high strength wastewater and well head protection agreements to ensure the beneficiary pays and our public works resources are protected.

Public Works also has the longer term goals of developing GIS mapping of our public works infrastructure, developing Public Works Standards and Specifications and updating our utility ordinances and rate structure. The Department also needs to inventory, assess and prioritize our public works infrastructure so that we can more fully understand our obligations and develop an informed multi-year capital program.

I often say, I'm not in the opinions business, but if there was ever a worthwhile investment to ensure the town's interest, public health and environment are protected, it is investing in ensuring you have adequate and qualified staffing within Public Works. Adequate infrastructure is also critical to support economic development. There is an upfront investment with personnel, but in the end it saves the municipality money to have qualified personnel looking out for and advancing your interest.