

First Selectman's Report

1/5/2021

Year in review 2020

2020 started out like any other year, but ended up being one of the toughest years in many ways. From the pandemic, to damaging storms, to the presidential election, it was definitely a rollercoaster full of stress and pain for many people. All was not doom and gloom. We pulled together and adapted to the conditions to make the best of the situation and will continue to do so until this crisis is over.

In Morris, we started out the New Year by meeting with representatives from SHR Energy at the proposed solar array sight adjacent to the Transfer Station on Lakeside Road. This project was delayed in 2020 due to inaction at the State Legislature. Now that some of those issues have been resolved, we look forward to this project moving forward in 2021. The project has received Inland Wetlands approval and will go before the Planning and Zoning Commission next.

The Smokey Hollow Bridge was completed at a cost far below the original estimate of 2.4 million due to the Town's decision to reduce the scope of the project from a two-lane bridge to a one-lane bridge. The cost of the project ended up being \$1,750,700 with the Town's share being approximately \$202,723 after utilizing a \$150,000 STEAP Grant obtained by former First Selectperson Karen Paradis in 2011. Smokey Hollow Road received new drainage, guardrails, and pavement. Parts of East Shore Road received new drainage as well.

The bathroom renovation project at the Morris Fire House has been completed and was paid through a \$150,000 STEAP Grant obtained by the First Selectman from the Dept. of Economic & Community Development of the State of CT. Work was also done to upgrade the Fire Company meeting room lighting and flooring and to renovate the small kitchen. The Legion Room at the lower level of the Fire House received new flooring as well. This work was paid for with a State grant for local capital improvement projects. The new ceiling and new lighting in the Legion Room were made possible by a grant from Thomaston Savings Bank. The Town Hall had exterior damage repaired and the trim painted and the Town Seal was put in place over the front door.

Covid-19 made things change in the way of doing business at the Town Hall. We decided to limit the access to the Town Hall by members of the public in an effort

to protect the employees working there and to protect the public as well. We have remained open throughout the pandemic and are currently on an appointment only basis, although some walk-in business is available as needed. The Library went from being open normally to providing curbside service only, then to being open to a limited number of patrons at one time and then back to curbside service as the number of COVID cases rose dramatically. We hope to return to having at least limited number of patrons allowed in the library in the near future and then to fully open as the situation improves. The Library has continued to provide online programming and events to the public all year.

The generosity of the public really showed during these hard times. Local businesses and individuals donated masks, sanitizing spray, food and other items for those who needed it. Volunteers helped to deliver food and medication to those who could not get out themselves and the Town delivered masks and thermometers to local businesses. The Town was able to provide 30 food baskets and gifts for Christmas all through donations from the Townspeople and businesses. We worked with the USDA, Red Cross, National Guard and others to deliver fresh food boxes to our neighbors.

Our Town departments remained busy with various activities. Beach and Recreation provided concerts on the Beach and on the Town Green and a boat parade on Bantam Lake. The Reading Room Committee sponsored the annual Labor Day concert at the Beach Pavilion. The Morris Fire Company hosted blood drives and were busy putting on truck parades throughout the Town to the delight of people young and old, as well as responding to 107 incidents during the year with 31 of those being mutual aid to neighboring towns. The Senior Center monitored our local seniors and provided them with activities to keep busy with and gift bags full of puzzles and snacks. Many departments, businesses and individuals came together this past December for the drive through Holiday display with lighting and displays in the Town Park and of course a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Clause.

The Town budget was approved by the Board of Finance with 1.42 mill rate reduction. The fiscal year ending on June 30, 2020 showed the Town to be in excellent fiscal condition with a surplus due to unanticipated revenue and reduced government spending. The monies the Town spent for COVID-19 related

supplies and services have been fully reimbursed by the Federal and State governments.

The Planning and Zoning Commission has been hard at work on the Town Plan of Conservation and Development. We hope to have the plan completed and approved by the Town in early 2021. A Housing Committee was formed by the Board of Selectmen and a 15,000 grant was obtained to create a housing plan as required by the State. This plan should be complete in 2021. The Economic Development Commission has been tasked with researching the possibility of bringing a fiber optic system to the Town that could provide improved internet and other services for the townspeople. This is a project that many towns in Northwest Connecticut are currently working on and it is expected to be a collaborative effort in the region.

The First Selectman applied for and received a \$128,205.00 STEAP Grant from the State to help fund the replacement of a deteriorating retaining wall at the Transfer Station. The project will go out to bid shortly and will be completed in 2021.

We are looking forward to making many improvements in the coming year and hopefully we will be returning to a more normal way of life in the near future. In the meantime, stay healthy and stay safe.

Tom Weik

First Selectman

