

Town Administrator 2009 Annual Report

To the Honorable Board of Selectmen and the Citizens of the Town of Ashburnham, I submit my report as Town Administrator.

Being selected as an unconventional candidate for Town Administrator has been a dream come true. Ashburnham needed to find the right manager yet, had the foresight to think outside the box. Several other communities were looking for a Town Administrator, but all wanted conventional experience. I would like to thank the Selection Committee and the Board of Selectmen for taking that chance. The transition from sixteen years of being Selectmen to Town Administrator has been exciting. Ashburnham is blessed and I am fortunate to have such a great group of support personnel and Sylvia Turcotte's assistance, experience and work ethic have been the foundation of my support.

In 2009 Ashburnham was faced with many significant issues. No event left a greater impact or level of appreciation than the Ice Storm of December 2008. Clean up and restoration of services was not complete until June of 2009. During this disaster we also learned to appreciate what we have and the extent of dedication and support of all our Town's citizens.

Our second wave of disaster struck on April 27, 2009 in the form of a flood in the Town Hall. A pipe in the room that housed our computer infrastructure ruptured. Due to the location, water flowed into the servers destroying all of them. For the next nine months, computer hardware was replaced and the facility repair proved more costly to the Town than the Ice Storm.

During the digging out from the Ice Storm and the repairs to Town Hall, our administration went through its own transformation. In January, our financial team was shaken with the departure of Town Administrator Kevin Paicos and Accountant James Shanahan. Fortunately, the Board of Selectmen hired Nancy Haines as the new Accountant and summoned the assistance of Norman Thidemann as Interim Town Administrator and with their guidance and expertise Ashburnham was able to stay on course. Nancy's stabilization of the Town's accounting was a major factor in the Ashburnham's A3 credit rating. This was a great accomplishment considering the DOR assessment in the prior year. Norm's return and calming demeanor was just what the doctor ordered. His management of the budget for FY10 and selection process for a new Town Administrator regained confidence in our administrative office.

The departure in July of the DPW Director, Don Ouellette, forced his responsibility of running the Public Works onto the shoulders of the DPW Superintendent Steve Nims and the newly appointed Superintendent of Water and Sewer Mark Petersen. They stepped up and flourished in each of their prospective positions.

The Council on Aging, due to budget constraints, had to eliminate the position of Director that was held by Mary Lee Muessel. The Council reassigned responsibilities to ensure that the Seniors of Ashburnham received uninterrupted and uncompromised service.

The Assessors looked to reorganize their responsibilities. After much review a Request for Proposal (RFP) for assessing services was sent out and on December 31st the Board relegated the day to day assessing activities to Regional Resource Group, Inc. (RRG).

Request for Proposals (RFP) for support services in Engineering, Information Technology and Insurance were all put to bid. This was done to update services and to ensure the cost effective use of tax dollars.

It should be noted that at the present time, the Town has a total of three pending lawsuits.

In the presence of all these issues laid the never dying aspect of the budget. Less than a month after the Annual Town Meeting it was determined that the funding we were anticipating from the State was falling apart. Revenues both local and state were being re-evaluated and six months into the budget each department was asked to make cuts. At the November Special Town Meeting cuts were made to the FY10 Budget in the amount of \$311,000. It was also made known that FY11 would prove even more difficult.

As we look at this past year in our rear view mirror, and the Ice Storm, flood damage and management issues become an ever decreasing image, we must hold to that which makes us wiser and let all others go. Reorganization and addition of key personnel gives us the tools and aspiration to move forward and work together on the challenges that await us in 2010.

Thank you for your continued support.

Respectfully submitted,
Doug Briggs
Town Administrator