

Select Board Sidelines

March 24, 2021

Submitted by Bill Lombardi

Road Bond – On July 14, 2020 at Town Meeting we voted to authorize the issuance of 1.8 Million dollars of bonds for the purpose of the Clarry Hill culvert replacement, road paving and to re-finance the outstanding debt (approx. \$525,000) from the 2015 note to The First. After many details and financial disclosures, including the conclusion of a current audit, these bonds are scheduled to come to market. We have received an AA bond rating by Standard & Poors. This is the second highest rating and implies very strong credit worthiness. Bids will open mid-April; closing will take place by month end. The objective: lower the interest expense on our outstanding debt and to have a low-cost way to pay for upcoming paving projects.

Road Workshop – What better way to address road paving than to have our second Road Workshop? The Select Board is planning on scheduling this workshop for mid-April (still working on getting it firm on the calendar). I expect we will address the issues brought to the Boards attention at the last workshop as well as reviewing the paving project already scheduled. This will be a time for taxpayers to bring other road issues to our attention.

Did you know Union has 43 miles of roads, 33 miles paved, 10 miles gravel?

Local Food Ordinance Committee – Some may have seen the recent article in the Village Soup regarding our last Select Board meeting where a Local Food Ordinance was presented. This committee has met multiple times over the past months. The objective of most on the committee was to find a balance that was congruent with our Comprehensive Plan to keep the rural nature of Union intact by supporting small local farms and insuring public confidence in the quality of local products. The Select Board voted to send the ordinance to the Town's lawyer for review.

Not everyone agrees with the necessity of having this ordinance. It's great that we all can express our opinions and hopefully develop compromise solutions. Some feel that product sold from a kitchen that is not certified by the state causes a health risk. Local producers take pride in the quality and safety of their products. We have produced food for our neighbors for hundreds of years. Now corporations write the rules. It's time for the small producer to have a voice. Over 70 towns in Maine have adopted similar food ordinances.

Some folks say that the state already has food safety laws. Union residents who want to sell their locally produced foods can follow those state laws. The state regulations were created for large operations. Here are a few examples of what this ordinance would allow: If a small goat farmer makes small batch artisan cheese, it would be illegal to sell to their neighbors. If someone bakes a cake or other pastry in their home kitchen it would be illegal for them to sell to their neighbors. These items could supplement the income of the small producer. Some could really benefit from a little micro-economic activity, and there is no reason why this cannot be done safely. We have written into the ordinance encouraging all producers to follow proper safety guidelines.

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In today's economy, and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to be doing all we can to encourage self-sufficiency and neighbors helping neighbors. Our country was founded by hard working characters who had to figure out how to survive in extreme situations. We ought to do what we can to preserve that spirit. Unfortunately, the state laws are cookie cutter designed for large operations, which limits the ability of small folks to earn a little extra money. Local food ordinances make it possible for micro-economies to flourish, keeping money in the local economy and giving people an avenue of entrepreneurship in order to create a little bit more cash flow.

Hopefully, this allows you to understand the nature of this ordinance a bit better. We look forward to questions and further discussion and clarity regarding the Food Ordinance.