

## **SELECTMEN'S REPORT**

### **Cover**

The annual report cover displays a collage of historical pictures in honor of the Town's 250<sup>th</sup> (semiquincentennial) anniversary on August 17, 2013. Coincidentally, the Village's 125<sup>th</sup> (quasquicentennial) anniversary took place in 2013 also. The two municipalities appointed representatives on a 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee to plan, organize, and implement a series of varied celebrations for this milestone event that included historic walking tours, lectures, cookouts, movies, and concerts as well as a spectacular fireworks display near Marble Mill Park to culminate this notable anniversary. Information on the celebration can be viewed at [www.swanton250.org](http://www.swanton250.org). This is the first time that the Town and Village will share the same annual report cover with only the names on the cover being different. The collage of historical photos is a visual reminder of the history that has been saved for us by previous Swanton generations. We can all be proud of our shared historical heritage.

### **Highlights of the Year**

In addition to the months long 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration mentioned above, 2013 was a year of several significant endeavors by the Town. It marked the first full year that a five-member Selectboard served the Town. The members include Chair John Lavoie, Vice Chair Dan Billado, Dick Thompson, Joel Clark, and Kathy Lavoie. The five-member board is working well with more members offering a wider variety of expertise and opinions during discussions of relevant municipal topics. Please contact us with any questions, concerns, or suggestions you may have about Town business. A *TOWN & VILLAGE DIRECTORY* is accessible on the Town's website at <http://www.townofswantonvermont.weebly.com>. The directory lists names and contact information for Town and Village officials.

The biggest endeavor of 2013 was the construction of the new highway garage at 221 First Street (about ¼ mile east of I-89 Exit 21 on the northerly side of VT Route 78). The garage construction began in April and was substantially completed in September. The cost was approximately \$800,000 and will be paid for with a \$600,000 loan over a 15-year period and the balance to be paid for with the sale of Town property. The new garage includes five truck bays plus one wash bay, radiant floor heating, mechanical ventilation, an upper level mezzanine for storage, a boiler room, a conference room, a kitchenette, a restroom, and the foreman's office. An on-site well and septic system are exterior additions. It measures 60 feet by 140 feet. The highway crew moved all of their equipment from the old garage on Fourth Street to the new one in October. It is now fully occupied and operational. A security fence and gate will be placed around the lot lines of the property in the spring of 2014. The old garage property is for sale. The proceeds of the sale will be used to pay down the new garage loan. We plan to fund another pay down of the loan through the sale of the Robin Hood Complex that will take place in September 2014 in accordance with the sales agreement.

In connection with the highway department, the Selectboard purchased a new 1-ton dump truck for snow plowing and sanding in the winter and general maintenance work at other times. It is a 2014 Chevy Silverado with a full cab. It has been getting a good workout this winter. A copy of the Town's Winter Road Maintenance Policy can be accessed on the Town of Swanton website at: <http://www.townofswantonvermont.weebly.com> at the top of the HOME PAGE. The Town's property tax maps and street maps are also viewable on the website.

The Town participated in three state grant programs in 2013. One is a Municipal Planning Grant for \$13,800 for professional assistance to the Planning Commission in rewriting sections of the *Zoning Bylaws*. Amendments will include making housekeeping changes, revising allowable uses in certain districts, adding new word definitions, and streamlining procedures among others. The rewrite is expected to be finished in the summer of 2014 and then forwarded to the Joint Legislative Body for adoption. It will become effective 21 days after adoption. The Northwest Regional Planning Commission was hired to assist the Planning Commission in the rewrite. A second grant from the Vermont Community Development Agency for \$375,000 was used to help Housing Foundations, Inc. buy Roy's Mobile Home Park. HFI is a nonprofit organization operating out of the state capital. In the past, HFI has participated in other successful housing projects in Swanton. The purchase of Roy's Mobile Home Park by HFI will ensure that much needed electrical upgrades are made and that the park rents will remain affordable for the people living there. The purchase also furthers the *Swanton Town & Village Municipal Plan*'s goal of encouraging affordable housing.

The other grant is a \$175,000 Vermont Transportation Class 2 Road Improvement Grant for the reconstruction and improvement of a section of Woods Hill Road. The Town provided a required 10% match for the project. The project included raising the elevation of the road between Cook Road and the Sheldon Town line, reconstructing the sub base in that same section, the installation of new culverts, the laying of a base coat of asphalt, extensive ditching work, and the installation of guard rails on the Hungerford Brook bridge. In 2014, a top coat of asphalt will be added to complete the project. The new asphalt extends from the Sheldon Town line to Highgate Road. Woods Hill Road is in much better condition now as a result of this project.

### **General Budget**

In 2013, the actual expenditures came in \$31,924.27 below the General Budget. Assuming all warned articles are approved, the proposed 2014 General Budget will be \$1,081,257.97 with \$457,371.72 to be raised by taxes. The Selectboard spends a considerable amount of time preparing the budget. We feel it is realistic, fair and fiscally responsible. We look for every way possible to maximize your tax dollars. All Swanton voters should make an effort to study and understand the budget and the special articles on this year's ballot. Please bring your questions and comments to the informational meeting on Monday, February 24, 2014 at the Swanton Village Municipal Complex, 120 First Street at 7:00 p.m. Again this year, our annual informational meeting will be telecast live on Comcast Cable Channel 16. There will also be an

opportunity for voters to phone in any questions you may have about the 2014 budget or other issues of interest. We look forward to seeing you and urge you to participate in the democratic process by exercising your right to vote on Town Meeting Day, Tuesday, March 4, 2014.

### **Highway**

Assuming all warned articles are approved, the proposed 2014 Highway Budget is \$1,235,265.56 with \$810,470.77 to be raised by taxes. As usual, the single largest expense in the Highway Budget was road resurfacing. During 2013, existing paved highways were resurfaced to ensure their long term viability. These included Maquam Shore, Sweet Hollow, Viens, and Bushey Roads. The Selectboard's goal is to pave all of our gravel roads because paved highways are less expensive to maintain compared to the constant upkeep of gravel roads. Currently, the only stretch of unpaved road in the Town is six tenths of a mile on Giroux Road.

During 2013, the Federal Railway Agency installed experimental railroad crossing signage at the Lakewood Drive crossing of the rail line. The crossbuck signs were replaced with new ones that are lined around the edges with silver dollar-sized, solar powered lights. The round, orange warning signs received similar treatment. A video camera was set up nearby to monitor and record driver responses to the lighted signs. The results will be known in 2014.

### **Recreation**

The Town's Healthy and Fit Recreation Path, which was funded by a grant from the Vermont Department of Health in 2009, remains an ever popular asset for residents seeking to improve their health and fitness. The Swanton Town Selectboard and employees worked hard to bring the project to fruition. It is heavily used throughout the year. Unfortunately, vandalism on the Recreation Path continued to persist in 2013. Informative signs that cost over \$100 each have been spray painted, torn from their posts, and thrown in the woods. Dog waste bags that are posted in metal containers along the trail have been pulled out in bunches and thrown away. In 2013, a concrete trash receptacle was busted up and left lying in pieces next to the trail. Destruction and abuse of public property is a crime. The Selectboard has in place a \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons causing this damage. You may call the Swanton Police at 868-4100 or the Swanton Town Administrator David Jescavage at 868-7418 to report any inappropriate incident you observe along the trail. People walking their dogs on the trail are encouraged to use the "doggie bags" to keep the trail clean and healthy for themselves and others. As a valuable recreational asset for the Town, the path deserves respect and appreciation.

### **Law Enforcement**

Last year, the Town funded \$111,358 for the first year of a 3-year contract with the Swanton Village Police Department for police protection. In 2014, the cost will be \$114,698 for the second year. The annual term runs from April 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup> for each contract year. The SVPD

provides coverage of 8 hours per day, 7 days per week for a total of 56 hours per week from 5:30 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. daily. This amount may be less if the actual billed time for the police protection is less. The costs include dispatching, police cruiser, investigations, traffic law enforcement, office work, compiling reports, mileage, and court appearances. The SVPD will provide all necessary equipment for the performance of duties and all officers will be fully certified by the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council. We are very pleased with the services being provided by the SVPD and have also received positive input on the police from our constituents.

### **Animal Control Officer**

In July of 2013, Allan Laroche resigned as the Town's Animal Control Officer (ACO) after several years of excellent service. The Selectboard hired Shawn Dashno to replace Allan. Shawn can be reached at the following numbers: (H) 868-6464 or (C) 829-0077. He can also be contacted by email at [swantonaco@gmail.com](mailto:swantonaco@gmail.com). The ACO deals only with dog issues. All issues concerning wild animals should be directed to a state conservation officer. To view a copy of the Town's *Dog Ordinance*, please visit the Town's website.

### **Economic Development**

The Town's Industrial Park, which is known as Park D, is located on the southerly side of Rt. 78 between Waugh Farm Road and Interstate 89. Numerous development permits including an Act 250 permit that had been originally issued in 2006 were nearing their expiration dates. With new interest in the site by prospective purchasers, we hired Cross Consulting to begin the process of renewing all of the permits. We are expecting to have some movement on the lots in 2014. As a second tier of our economic development strategy, we encouraged zoning bylaw amendments that will make development in the Town's *Southern Growth District* near St. Albans much easier. As an integral part of Swanton's Joint Legislative Body, we voted to adopt these changes which became effective on January 8, 2014. As a Selectboard, we are cognizant of the need to improve the Town's revenues by increasing the commercial/industrial tax base.

### **Recognition**

The Swanton Selectboard would like to express its gratitude to all of our town employees, appointed board members and elected officials for their dedicated public service. It requires a tremendous amount of coordination between our employees, elected and appointed officials and volunteers dedicating their time and talents to keep our local government functioning properly and efficiently. We also are grateful for the input received from Swanton citizens on Town operations. Any citizen who is interested in volunteering for service on any particular Town board or committee may contact Town Administrator David Jescavage at 868-7418 for more details. Also, please visit our official website at <http://www.townofswantonvermont.weebly.com> for a variety of facts, figures, photos, and other information on our beautiful Town.

