

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

TO: Honorable Town Council Members

FROM: Karl F. Kilduff, Town Manager

DATE: June 15, 2022

Please find my report concerning various items of interest to the Town Council and community.

1. Council Business:

- STEAP Grant – The State has opened a new grant round for the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP). Unlike the last round, STEAP is returning to a competitive \$500,000 maximum award. The last round had a maximum award of \$128,000 which was awarded to Clinton for the downtown façade program.

The new round will rank applications higher which are “shovel ready” and include a local financial match. While any eligible project can be submitted, projects that are ready to be executed but for State money will be rated higher and be more competitive. Local financial matching dollars cannot be in-kind expenses or include ARPA dollars. I am looking at potential projects which are ready to go and have a documentable financial local match.

As webinar was held by the Office of Policy and Management on June 1 which announced the program, the conditions and priorities for this round, grant close out requirements, and other questions on the current round.

Additionally, STEAP grants that are more than 5 years old have to be closed out in order to submit an application. Clinton has an older STEAP grant that was being used by Park & Recreation. I have clarified the status of the grant locally and started the process with the State to close out the grant and clear a path for us. There is no funding to return to the State.

- Affordable Housing Plan – The committee that was assigned to work on the state-mandated Affordable Housing Plan will meet on June 16 to discuss the draft plan with the consultant team. The committee should be referring the draft to the Town Council for final approval. The COG is nearly complete with their regional housing plan (of which our affordable housing plan would be a part). This document too will need local approvals too.
- Projects List – Previously I have pointed out to the Council that the Town needs a list of projects that reflect a consensus and are ready to go as strategic priorities. The project list is important as a grant funding menu. The current emphasis in many grants are projects that have a local match and/or have been developed to be ready for execution. I have asked Department Heads for feedback on projects in their areas that could form the basis of a pipeline as well as the projects status (concept/study/design).

2. River COG:

The Council of Governments will meet again on June 22, 2022.

3. Estuary Transit District:

The District has met and a number of its subcommittees. Of note, the free fare program was extended to the end of November. The Park Connect program that will service Hammonasset Park is being jointly marketed by the DOT and the Transit District.

4. Miscellaneous:

- Federal Infrastructure Funding – The State is still refining the process to aid in accessing federal funds for infrastructure. The delivery system seems to have local governments feeding their potential projects to the COGs. The COGs would look to bundle projects and identify areas where a project or projects could be made regional. The federal government has emphasized a preference for projects that are regional in nature. The COGs would then send projects on to the State. This process puts more work on the Councils of Governments. It looks like at least one COG is increasing its staff to accommodate this new process. I have asked River COG for their plan and an update for their response. While towns can always directly submit applications to the federal government, the State has made it very clear that they want projects to be bundled and coordinated through them.
- Town Engineer Bid – The Town is currently out for bid to contract for on-call Town Engineer services. We issued a bid for this in 2020 but did not make the award at the time. It is our intent to make the award this time. Proposals are due by the end of the month and we will review proposals for price, capacity and responsiveness.
- Hiring – Interviews were conducted for 3 potential candidates to fill a vacancy at the Truck Driver level in Public Works to bring a candidate forward for ratification.

A number of applications have come in to serve as dockmaster for the town docks. The Chair of the Harbor Management Commission has been involved in the process and some of the Commission will participate in the interviews for a successful candidate.

Additionally, Christina Acampora was on-boarded as our new Senior Program Coordinator. We had a good discussion on her steps and set out the direction for this new program. She had a good first week building partnerships with the Library and others who could support senior activities.

- Fire Department Water Supply Project – The Town did provide funding under a prior bond authorization to fund water supply tanks for the Fire Department which would expand the availability of water (beyond the supply brought by a tanker truck). That project is now moving forward. The Fire Department has already secured land use approvals for the first three tank locations. I am working with the Department and their engineer on the bid specifications before the projects are put out for bid.

- Future of MIRA and Solid Waste – At present, solid waste that is collected by local haulers or at the transfer station are supposed to be carted to Essex for MIRA's handling. Without the trash-to-energy plant in Hartford. Waste is generally being shipped out of State. Waste in Essex is supposed to be directed to the trash-to-energy plant in Preston. Long-term (as in next year) MIRA may not be in a position to subsidize tip fees for solid waste and it is clear that they want to encourage municipalities seek out other alternatives. A regional bid would make some sense, but falling short of that I am working on a Clinton-only bid. A multi-town bid is a possibility so we need to be flexible in our approach before landing on a plan going forward. A decision to leave MIRA under our agreement would need to be made in early 2023 for waste collected after July 1, 2023.

Solid waste will become a larger issue as we go forward. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is trying to schedule regional meetings to discuss options going forward to handle the future of waste. Additionally, we are in the process of submitting a permit request to DEEP to compost food scraps with leaves as a way to address locally generated waste. This is a more cost effective approach on a per ton basis that contracting with the one entity that takes food scraps to the one digester