

For the Week of April 25, 2022

Manager's Message

Aaron Frank, Town Manager



Attention Homeowners:

The State may help homeowners with some delinquent balances through their Vermont Homeowner Assistance Program (HAP). This program provides aid for homeowners who have experienced financial hardship due to COVID-19. Homeowners may be eligible if they have an income equal to or less than 150% of the area median income, have a primary residence located in Vermont, and have experienced a financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic after January 21, 2020, including job loss, a reduction in income, or increased costs due to illness or the need to care for a family member. Eligible Vermonters may be awarded with VT HAP funds to reinstate a mortgage (including property tax and insurance escrows, servicer advances and fees), and to prevent home foreclosure and homeowner displacement by alleviating overdue mortgage payments, homeowners' association fees or liens, condominium association fees, property taxes, and/or utilities, including electric, gas, fuel oil, and water.

The VT HAP program is accepting applications. You can find out more information by calling 833-221-4208 or visiting the website where you can also apply: <https://vermonthap.vhfa.org/>. For FAQs, visit <https://vermonthap.vhfa.org/faq>.

Town News Interviews

How Colchester Cares for Roadways and Waterways

*An interview with Bryan Osborne, Director of Colchester's Public Works Department
by Alicia Tebeau-Sherry*

I met with the Director of the Department of Public Works, Bryan Osborne, to discuss what services the department provides, how their projects come to be, and their connections and outreach to the Colchester community.

ATS: To familiarize others about you and the Department of Public Works, can you tell me about what you and the department do for the Town.?

BO: We are responsible for the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of the Town's public infrastructure. Public infrastructure refers to such things as roadways, bridges, sidewalks, bike paths, drainage systems,



A piece of "rolling stock" conducting routine mowing

sanitary sewer systems, and the Town's buildings and equipment. We have a garage where we maintain the Town's rolling stock equipment which are essentially pieces of equipment that are registered for roadway use. This includes police cars, firetrucks, ambulances, public works' and recreation's equipment, and more. All together we maintain 117 pieces of "rolling stock."



Maintenance on a piece of "rolling stock"

However, there are 100 other pieces of smaller equipment like mowers for the Town parks, weed whackers, chain saws, trailers, and much more, that we also store and maintain.

ATS: What might the community not know about your Department and what it offers?

BO: We maintain 92 miles of roadways, 42 miles of sidewalks and bike paths, 900 street lights, 2,700 sewer and stormwater structures, 38 miles of sewer and stormwater piping, 13 pump stations, 15 public buildings, and 217 pieces of equipment.

ATS: When and how did you start working for the Town of Colchester?

BO: I came to work for Colchester as their first Public Works Director in 1991 after working for the City of Burlington for 7 years. What was really appealing to me about working for Colchester was how different the community was compared to Burlington. Burlington's public infrastructure was fully developed, so the challenges that we faced there were trying to take care of everything that had already been built. Colchester was, comparatively, at the early stages of infrastructure development. I saw it as an opportunity to be able to influence the development of infrastructure in Colchester early on versus dealing with infrastructure that was inherited from years ago. That's why I came here, and I have not regretted it since.

ATS: What does a typical day in the Department of Public Works look like?

BO: The best word to describe a typical day is actually untypical—we often come in with a to-do list and end up creating a new one throughout the day. There is always something different to work on and there is a lot of adapting taking place. Fortunately, my staff and I work very closely with each other, as there is a lot of collaboration needed. There are three distinct functional areas of public works—Operations, Engineering, and Technical Services. Operations exists at the garage under the direction of our Operations Manager, Randy Alemy. Operations maintains and repairs all of our public infrastructure. Engineering is under the direction of our Town Engineer, Amanda Clayton. Engineering manages the design and construction of our public infrastructure and reviews all new development in Colchester that will ultimately become public infrastructure. Technical Services is under Karen Adams. Technical Services manages the community's water quality through stormwater and wastewater, and performs a wide variety of technical tasks associated with the Town's public infrastructure. While each of these areas has its own specific responsibilities, they are also integrally linked. The planning, design, construction, operation,

and maintenance of public infrastructure will involve all of these areas, so it really requires a lot of collaboration.

ATS: What types of projects has the Department of Public Works been working on and what can the community look forward to from the completion of these projects?

BO: Primary investments have been in transportation, water quality, and energy conservation. These projects will provide safer and more efficient transportation systems, improve water quality in our lakes and streams, and reduce energy costs. These projects include intersection work on Prim and West Lakeshore Drive and Bayside Intersection, paving projects, like one along Severance Road, the Malletts Bay Sewer project, Shore Acres and Smith Creek stormwater improvements, Phosphorous Control Plans, Solar Farms, and energy conservation measures in Town buildings.



Stormwater condition assessment

ATS: How are these projects developed? How do you monitor and respond to the state of Town infrastructure?

BO: There are a few ways that projects are developed. First, we do regular condition assessments—we go out, measure, and evaluate the condition of all of our infrastructure. Then, knowing what kind of condition they are in, we know which infrastructure needs attention and we can structure and fund capital plans so that we can address the issues. A perfect example is the paving program, which is a part of the capital transportation program. This program provides funding for the paving of the Town's 92-mile transportation system. We inspect every roadway in Colchester and complete a detailed condition assessment, looking at all the types of pavement distress, the overall condition, traffic volumes, and the condition of the sub base. Then we'll design rehabilitation strategies for each of those roads. We use computer software that allows us to prioritize all of those roadways by pavement conditions. What we are really measuring is the PCI, or pavement condition index, and we use that index within this numeric process which allows us to prioritize which roads need to be paved first to ensure the best investment for the community. Here, early intervention is key, as it allows us to rehabilitate a roadway prior to it requiring a much costlier repair.



Drainage project work

The next main area that projects come from are those required by various regulatory agencies. For example, we do a lot of stormwater projects. We do these because it will improve water quality in Malletts Bay, which is really important to us, but also because they are required under our federal permits that are looking to improve water quality as well. We are a MS4 Community, which stands for Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System, and we therefore fall under a federal permit that requires us to develop different programs. For instance, our MS4 permit requires us to develop a phosphorus control plan to reduce the discharge of phosphorus into Lake Champlain. This is accomplished through the development and construction of a variety of stormwater improvement projects.

The other main area where projects come from would be similar to completing the condition assessment, but rather than the condition, we look at safety through safety assessments of our infrastructure. With these assessments, we observe how the safety of infrastructure could be improved, such as an intersection that could benefit from a different configuration and improved control of traffic. We like to keep our projects coming from those three areas because they allow us to be proactive and plan for those projects, rather than having us respond to something unexpected.

ATS: How do you engage with the community about these projects? Are there ways for the community to become involved?

BO: We engage in several ways: we hold public meetings and hearings, report updates in the Town Newsletter, website, and Front Porch Forum and share news with local newspapers. There are a variety of ways we interface with the public, but the process that I can think of with the most community involvement is a process commonly referred to as scoping. Scoping is a planning exercise which is often a pre-requisite step to use state or federal funds, particularly for transportation projects. The process involves multiple public meetings in which the public is able to come in at the very onset of the project and is engaged to work with us and identify what the problem is, and to create a problem statement.

For example, if we're doing scoping for improvements to an intersection, we'd be asking what the public see as the problem with the intersection. For instance, we may ask, "when you drive through the intersection, what do you observe, and what do you think should be done to improve it?" Then from any feedback we get, we'll develop a number of different alternatives to address the problem statement.



Intersection planning



Water quality sampling

Along with these alternatives, we will develop cost estimates and identify how well each alternative addresses the problem statement, as well as consideration to environmental resources. We'll then bring the possible alternatives back to the public and have them weigh-in on which they like and which they don't like. Ultimately, we will bring the preferred alternative to the Selectboard for their endorsement. This endorsement would conclude the scoping process, and we'd have a planning document that has benefitted from a better definition of the problem, purpose, and need, looked at alternatives, selected a preferred alternative that is generally supported by the public at large, and has been formally supported by the legislative body. At that point, we are then in a much better position to apply for additional funding. Overall, it gives the public the opportunity to participate in the development of projects from the very beginning.

ATS: What are you proud of that your department has completed?

BO: Our physical accomplishments are nothing more than what we are expected to do for the community. What I am most proud of is the development of our staff, their dedication and passion to provide the best service they can to our community, and their unwavering commitment to excellence.

ATS: What can we expect to hear about coming up in the future for your department?

BO: There will be a continued emphasis on all aspects of water quality and other critical infrastructure. We have a strong focus on water quality because Colchester has 27 miles of shoreline on Lake Champlain. Next to the citizens of Colchester, the lake is our most valuable asset. We have to take care of it and be stewards of it, so that is why water quality is so important to the department. Whether we're dealing with wastewater, stormwater, land-use, or maintaining infrastructure, all of these have a watchful eye on water quality in some way. Since I started here, I've always been focused on reducing our footprint on the Bay. This is a primary reason why we have created a Technical Services section that focuses on water quality. With the formation of a Stormwater Utility, this is the only operational area of public works that has a dedicated manager, with a funding program that significantly increases the amount of funding available for water quality. In the next 30 years, there are over \$27 million in stormwater improvements planned, making stormwater the most significant investment area of all Town capital cost centers. We will also continue to work aggressively on the rest of our critical infrastructure, such as transportation, as people need to be able to travel around and through the community effectively and safely.

ATS: Anything else you'd like to add? And how can the community keep up with the Department of Public Works?

BO: I'd like to add that I've always felt so appreciative of the support from the community, specifically in supporting our efforts to improve water quality and the public infrastructure that they use every day. It's expensive, but the community has been very supportive of those types of initiatives, projects, and programs, so I've been really appreciative of that ever since I began this position. Additionally, the best way to keep up with us is via Town meetings, newsletters, and our page on the Town website.



Grading project

Department Updates

Department of Public Works:



Flushable Wipes are NOT Flushable: We have been experiencing a high number of sewer system clogs and on-site septic system backups due to the presence of foreign materials being placed in wastewater disposal systems. Please NEVER flush anything beyond human waste and toilet paper. Flushing other items, especially “flushable wipes” causes backups that can create unsanitary conditions and ultimately lead to your septic system failing, which is expensive to replace - or a sewer clog that is costly to repair, raising user fees for the sewer users.

Upcoming Town Meetings

Selectboard: Tuesday, April 26, 6:30 pm at the Colchester Town Offices, 3rd Floor Outer Bay Conference Room, 781 Blakely Road. Residents are welcome to attend the meeting or alternatively send a note, up to 1,000 words, to TownManager@colchestervt.gov with “Citizens to be Heard” in the Subject and their name and address in the body of the email. The email will be shared with the entire Selectboard prior to the meeting and included in the information packet at the next meeting (as the information packet for the current meeting is sent out along with the agenda).

- Watch the Meeting Online via Live Stream: <http://lcatv.org/live-stream-2>
- Agenda: www.bit.ly/Colchester-SB-Agendas

Subscribe to the Town Newsletter: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/jkMAO2v>

For more information or to comment, call 802-264-5509 or email townmanager@colchestervt.gov