

**TOWN OF GILFORD
SUMMER TOWN FORUM
AUGUST 16, 2006
6:30 P.M.**

The Summer Town Forum was held at the Gilford Town Hall, 47 Cherry Valley Road in Conference Rooms A & B.

Chairman Dennis Doten welcomed the persons in attendance and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

He then asked those seated at the table to introduce themselves. In attendance were: Fire Chief Jim Hayes, Police Chief John Markland, Assistant Town Administrator Debra Shackett, Town Administrator Evans Juris, Administrative Secretary Sandy Bailey, Selectman Dennis Doten, Facilitator John Cameron, Selectman Alice Boucher, Selectman Connie Grant, Town Clerk/Tax Collector Denise Morrissette, Public Works Director Sheldon Morgan, Recreation Director Herb Greene and Planning Director John Ayer.

Members of the audience that were also introduced included Town Appraiser Wil Corcoran, Robert Boley from NH DRA, Technology Director Don Girard, Deputy Town Clerk Jenn Mooney, Planning Board Chair and Library Trustee Polly Sanfacon, Conservation Commission Chair John Goodhue, Police Captain Kevin Keenan and Budget Committee Chairman Dick Hickok.

The meeting was turned over to Facilitator John Cameron. Mr. Cameron explained that Department Heads will make a brief presentation, followed by a period of questions and comments from members of the public. He reviewed the rules of decorum for the meeting and further stated that each member of the public will have a time limit of five minutes for their first time speaking and a one minute time limit for each additional time.

- Chairman Doten began the presentations with a brief review of accomplishments and goals for 2006. He asked Town Administrator Juris to provide an overview of the CIP Committee, which will help minimize property tax impact on major cost items by utilizing capital reserve accounts.
- Sheldon Morgan, Director of Public Works, stated that his department has been “reactive” this year due to excessive rainfall. He stated that 37+ inches of rain have fallen so far this year, which has necessitated considerable maintenance work with culverts and ditches. The paving schedule is, therefore, running a little late. He also reviewed the road work that has been accomplished and further goals for 2006, including Young Road. Mr. Morgan also reviewed the situation at the Glendale Docks and would like to have a more intensive plan in place for 2007 regarding trash removal.
- Town Clerk/Tax Collector Denise Morrissette stated that her office has extended their hours so that they are now open on Thursday nights until 7:00 p.m. She also

reminded persons in attendance that a drop box is located in the Town Hall parking lot so that payments can be made at any time. Ms. Morrissette also provided an overview of forthcoming goals, which would allow for e-mailing reminder notices and eventually being able to use “e-regs” for renewals. She also encouraged persons in attendance to utilize the Town’s website for basic information.

- Police Chief John Markland stated that he has been able to focus on duties of various members of the department, after the defeat of the warrant article in March 2006 for a new police facility. He further explained that when Chief Juris became Town Administrator, all responsibilities shifted within his department. He pointed out that the activity peaks in the summer season and he reviewed several of the activities his department has been involved with. He also briefly discussed the Glendale officers and advised island residents that he appreciates the feedback that they provide him.

- Fire Chief Jim Hayes briefly reviewed personnel changes that have occurred during the past year. He also advised the persons in attendance that the call company has been reinvigorated and now has 19 paid call firefighters. Chief Hayes also reviewed fire activity, equipment status and grants received. He also pointed out that a priority of his department has been to have all properties correctly numbered so that they can be located by emergency personnel.

- Recreation Herb Greene stated that he began his employment on June 8, 2006. He stated that the shed at the Village Field has been completely remodeled. He also stated that the department has received a defibrillator and the summer season has been extremely busy with swimming lessons and various other activities. The Old Home Day preparations are underway and he expects the program book will be available by the end of the week. Mr. Greene further stated that he intends to evaluate all activities after the summer season.

- Town Appraiser Wil Corcoran stated that it is necessary to adjust the assessments each year as the market changes. Although the market was increasing for some time, it is now at a standstill. He provided an explanation of how the assessment update is performed. Properties are currently at an average of 81% of market value and they need to move closer to 100%. Mr. Corcoran further stated that property value changes would vary percentage-wise because of the many diverse properties that compile the tax base.

Mr. Corcoran reiterated that the Town must be in compliance with State requirements. He further stated that it is easier on the taxpayer to change with the market than waiting ten years for a reassessment. Mr. Corcoran stated that notices for new assessments should be sent out by the end of the month.

Public Input and Questions

John Cameron reviewed the rules of decorum for the public and reminded each speaker

that they would be given five (5) minutes to speak.

Phil Nash of Lockes Island, who is President of the Gilford Island Association, commended the staff at the Glendale Docks, but is concerned about Labor Day weekend coverage. Chief Markland assured him that there would be adequate coverage. Mr. Nash also expressed concern because of many island residents who have had to sell their property because they could not afford the taxes anymore. He would like to see something set up so that these residents can keep their properties.

Richard Holdaway of Mark Island expressed concern with the fire department boat. He feels that many island properties are difficult to determine and the Police and Fire Departments should learn the access paths through rocky areas. Mr. Holdaway also expressed concern with a lack of response from the Fire Department during a recent emergency situation.

Forest Totes of Fish Island questioned Wil Corcoran on the sales data that he used in determining the ratio for island properties. Mr. Corcoran provided an explanation of market activity and the implication of information that was stated in the newspaper. Although there were only four island sales this year, Mr. Corcoran stated that they all indicated the same thing – the percentage amount did not vary.

John Goodhue of Mark Island does not feel that seasonal residents should have to pay school taxes. Morris Harrison of Varney Point thanked Sheldon Morgan and Evans Juris for their efforts in helping the people on Varney Point. He also pointed out that Town Administrator Juris is frequently a guest on a morning radio show. Mr. Harrison also asked Chief Hayes to explain about the requirements for fire permits for outdoor fireplaces, etc. Chief Hayes stated that fire permits are required, due to a recent legislative change brought about by their popularity, including a requirement to be twenty-five (25) feet from any building. He also stated that he does not have enforcement authority because he cannot go on someone's property unless he is invited.

Ron Silver of Jolly Island advised the Police and Fire Departments that he is still working on updating a list of contacts for all island properties. He further stated that problems with privacy concerns have caused the project to take longer than expected.

Joe Hoffman of Smith Cove reiterated a previously stated position that island residents do not get the benefit of many town services. He also made remarks about Town Counsel Walter Mitchell and Town Appraiser Wil Corcoran. Mr. Hoffman provided attendees with a three-page handout entitled "Gilford Summer Forum a.k.a. Town Meeting".

Richard Holdaway asked Herb Greene about recent problems at the Town beach. Mr. Greene explained about the DES water sampling and stated he was advised of the problem last Thursday afternoon. After re-testing, the beach was reopened on Sunday morning.

Selectman Boucher suggested that Mr. Boley of NH DRA address some of the island property tax concerns that have been expressed tonight. Mr. Boley stated that NH law makes no provision to “partial out” property taxes and all properties must receive the full tax levy. Selectmen Boucher further asked Mr. Boley to discuss the assessment updates. Mr. Boley stated that property values must be brought to 100% and all properties must be reasonably proportionate. He further stated that the DRA does a ratio study for each town and monitors the towns to ensure that they are proportionate. Mr. Boley stated that the Town of Gilford adheres to the State statutes.

Phil Nash asked about a sales tax for New Hampshire. Mr. Boley informed him that he has no explanation for that issue and it should be addressed at the legislative level.

Ron Silver asked about the legality and fairness of seeking sales data in another town if none is available in Gilford for a particular type of property. Mr. Boley stated that this method is both fair and appropriate.

Joe Hoffman then asked how Wil Corcoran was able to reduce Fays Boatyard’s assessment. Mr. Boley responded to this by stating that all abatements must be approved by the Board of Selectmen. At this time, Mr. Cameron warned Mr. Hoffman that he had exceeded his time limit and could no longer speak. When Mr. Hoffman continued speaking, Mr. Cameron asked a police officer to escort Mr. Hoffman out of the building. Captain Keenan escorted Mr. Hoffman out of the building at this time.

John Goodhue stated that he sympathized with Mr. Corcoran with the difficulty in assessing various types of property. He then asked Mr. Boley if Gilford would become a “donor” town. Mr. Boley stated that there are no longer any “donor” towns. Mr. Goodhue also stated that he feels that non-residents should have more say in how the Town is run and how the money is spent.

Ron Silver asked Mr. Boley to explain the difference between residential and commercial property values. Richard Holdaway suggested that island residents should not have to pay taxes on their building for half of a year since it is unusable and inaccessible for that amount of time. Phil Nash asked for an explanation of “view” tax. Mr. Boley responded to these issues and in closing, Mr. Nash thanked the Town of Gilford for holding this forum.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra J. Bailey
Administrative Secretary