

**TOWN OF GILFORD
SUMMER TOWN FORUM
AUGUST 11, 2010
6:00 P.M.**

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

Chairman Kevin Hayes welcomed the persons in attendance and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

In attendance were Selectman Hayes, Selectman O'Brien, Selectman Benavides, Finance Director Geoff Ruggles, Recreation Assistant Tracie Bettez, Town Clerk/Tax Collector Denise Morrissette, DPW Director Sheldon Morgan, Director of Planning and Land Use John Ayer, Fire Chief John Beland, Assessor Wil Corcoran, Executive Secretary Sandra Bailey, Town Administrator Scott Dunn, Library Director Katherine Dormody and Police Chief John Markland.

Town Administrator Dunn began by stating that the Town of Gilford has the most professional and dedicated staff of any municipality that he has worked for. He further advised members of the public in attendance that a great deal of his time is utilized writing policies, union negotiations, disposition of Town property matters and other legal matters. A great deal of focus is placed on the tax rate with the matter of costs vs. services always being taken into consideration.

Finance Director Geoff Ruggles stated that revenues are down by approximately 3% from this same time period last year, but it is not a significant amount to affect the overall budget. Property taxes are being paid and there is a slight increase in budget expenditures from this same time period last year.

Police Chief Markland stated that his Department's activity level is up by over 600 calls from the same time period last year. The number of arrests remains approximately the same and the number of accidents has decreased. Chief Markland pointed out that in this poor economy, the crime rate has increased. A new officer has graduated from the Police Academy and another officer will begin attending the Police Academy at the end of the month.

Fire Chief John Beland stated that Gilford Fire-Rescue has been very busy, with 104 more calls this year than at the same time period last year. This summer has brought building fires and the rescue of injured persons from mountains, as well as some successful resuscitations. Chief Markland provided an update on the status of the training facility that is being constructed on Town property on Kimball Road. He emphasized the importance of having firefighters keep their skills sharp. Chief Markland advised island residents that they can help Gilford Fire-Rescue by burning their brush as it is cut, placing their house number on their dock and/or building and calling promptly when help is needed.

Recreation Assistant Tracie Bettez stated that in this poor economy, many families are utilizing the services of the Parks and Recreation Department with their low cost, close to home activities. Updates to facilities included a new raft at Gilford Beach and a new gate at the Village Field. Successful programming this summer has included Red Sox trips, golf at Bolduc Park and Pheasant Ridge Country Club, basketball, tennis, softball, soccer, beach arts and crafts, swim lessons, archery and lacrosse. She further reported that the Old Home Day Committee needs approximately \$10,000 more in donations to meet their expenses for this year. They will be reaching out to citizens via their "bucket brigades" at the parade.

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Denise Morrissette reported that her office has had approximately 9,500 walk-ins so far in 2010. She provided statistics on various services that have been performed, particularly those pertaining to the Glendale Docks. She reminded residents that she is an authorized boat agent and urged them to register their boats with the Town so that the revenue is kept here. She also advised residents that she has implemented an e-mail reminder system for automobile renewals. This is an efficient and cost effective means of providing reminders.

Library Director Katherine Dormody reported that the Library has also had a busy summer and their Summer Reading Program is concluding. She also explained that the Library is moving away from the Dewey Decimal System and will organize their non-fiction selections in a subject-based, bookstore model.

Director of Planning and Land Use John Ayer briefly reviewed statistics regarding 2010 building permits. He also reported that Hannaford Brothers will be coming before the Planning Board in the very near future to update their plans for a new store next to Lowe's. This store will be slightly smaller than the one that was originally planned and the timing of the move is based on their lease ending at the Wal-Mart Plaza. The Department of Planning and Land Use is moving downstairs into the offices that were vacated by the SAU Office next week.

DPW Director Sheldon Morgan announced that the Alvah Wilson sidewalk project will commence tomorrow. Other current projects include repairs to the Glen Bridge, upgrades to Ridgewood Avenue, repairs to the Recycling Center access road and completion of upgrades to Hoyt Road. Repairs to the Glendale Dock #1 have been postponed to fall due to high water. Director Morgan also provided an explanation regarding the lighting problem at the docks. They are currently experimenting with solar lights since there is no easy way to repair the existing lighting system.

Town Appraiser Wil Corcoran reported that the real estate market is stable, with sales up 10% over the same period last year. Gilford has had 35 foreclosures, so far this year, but the sales after the foreclosures have been high. Because they actively track market activity, Mr. Corcoran provided statistics regarding average sale prices and stated that he sees softness in the manufactured housing market. At this time, the Town has no pending appeals with the BTLA and abatements are down.

Public Input and Questions

Don Onofrio provided the Board with a petition to lower the speed limit from 35 mph to 25 mph on Scenic Drive. Mr. Onofrio pointed out various concerns and problems that exist, including heavy pedestrian traffic on a very narrow road, with vehicles entering Scenic Drive at a high rate of speed coming off of Route 11. Mr. Onofrio suggested possible signage that could also alleviate some of the problems. Chairman Hayes thanked him for the petition and will address this further at the next meeting.

Barbara Aichinger of Governor's Island asked the Board what they are doing to lower the tax rate. Selectman Benavides responded with examples of various changes that have been made, resulting in decreased costs. He cited restructuring personnel in the Finance Office, eliminating COLA raises, and outsourcing technology services. These reductions, as well as many others, have resulted in zero growth in budgets over the past few years. Ms. Aichinger stated that she would like to see reductions in the budget, not just zero growth. Selectman Benavides replied

that Town employees are very much respected and have had numerous personnel policy changes, resulting in overall wage reductions. Ms. Aichinger responded to this by pointing out that Town employees are “quite low on the food chain”, with the taxpayers being at the top of it.

Wil Corcoran pointed out to Ms. Aichinger that the Town budget is only a portion of the tax rate, and the 2009 rate included a 7% county increase, a 6% state increase and 1.5% school increase.

John Goodhue commented on the School District’s budget of \$22 million annually for 1,200 students. He is very concerned with these costs, as well as Town costs, and feels the need to privatize more services to reduce the tax rate. He thinks it is important to have the lighting issue at Glendale taken care of and agrees that the speed limit should be reduced on Scenic Drive.

Connie Grant appreciates the efficiency at Glendale this year and highly praised Glendale Officer Clint Phelps for his contributions. Priscilla Sutcliffe made some suggestions regarding safety concerns at the docks. Chairman Hayes asked her to place her comments in writing to Sheldon Morgan so that they can be reviewed at the Glendale Committee meeting in the fall.

Selectman O’Brien stated that he has always been a proponent to provide services, but knows that the Board has to constantly balance costs vs. services. The Town cannot close down a Department in response to budgetary concerns. In closing, Town Administrator Dun stated that many purchases have been deferred over the past few years and at some point, they will need to be addressed. He further stated that the number of employees has been reduced, while various departments are showing increased activity and services to the public. He reiterated the need to constantly balance costs vs. services.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gus Benavides
Clerk