

# FIRST SELECTMAN COLUMN

02/09/2023 ISSUE DATE

As we move into a challenging 2023/24 budget season, our board of selectmen is reminded of how many looming needs and projects will have to be accounted for (or not) in Sherman's future. Some of these might be put off to the next year's budget, but in any case, there are several decisions for our board and ultimately the public to make on several fronts.

Our emergency services team continues to receive an increase in calls, particularly ambulance calls. Staffing this type of call and other emergencies is starting to become more difficult and eventually we are going to have to take a serious look at how we can keep up. It's critical that we continue, as we always have, to serve the public during emergencies and our board in conjunction with the excellent Sherman Volunteer Fire Department is committed to keeping our response to people in need at the highest possible level. The specifics of this vary and will be discussed thoroughly at the budget meetings.

The cost of the Sherman School building repair is a major issue. It's the biggest issue facing us. Right now, we don't have any numbers on this, but they will be forthcoming in the next two months. There is more public education slated for this situation and in the weeks afterwards there will be a referendum on approving the likely bond needed for these repairs. Right now, as I said, we don't know the amount of that bond and the ensuing tax increase from approving it; it is clear, however, that the school needs some significant work particularly on its HVAC, plumbing, and its roof along with other improvements that the building committee will bring forward. This will be an important referendum.

The Board of Selectmen (BOS) is continuing to move forward on a new Senior Center. The cost for this pales compared to the Sherman School repair, yet, if passed by the voters, is a significant capital expense. In addition, there is the upkeep, heating, and even staffing that a larger newer facility will need. There are plenty of reasons to build a new Senior Center and as we move closer and have public forums on this, we will outline them specifically. But the BOS's task is to offer voters a chance in referendum to approve (or not) a new Senior Center. So, we are in the process of bringing this along. Again, nothing happens without the approval of the voters by a majority vote.

Almost every budgetary entity in Town this year is asking for more money. Some increases are small and some are large relative to their budgets. This will add to this fiscal year's challenge to keep budgets as low as possible. The largest budget entity, the Board of Education, which is 67% of the entire budget, is currently considering a budget with a 3.94% increase. Moreover, fuel is higher, insurance is higher, and the cost of maintenance and materials is higher. The BOS and its team along with consideration by all budget drivers has lowered taxes four years in a row and has lowered taxes 10.2% in the last 5 years. Will this continue? Time will tell.

A little budgeting good news: our Grand List has grown and while the exact number is not available, it looks like Sherman is going to experience another significant increase in revenue for the year. Want more good news? You live in Sherman, which is a wonderful, beautiful, and caring town full of interesting and engaging people. The best news? You have friends and family that care for you. You may have your health – which is more precious than anything.



DON LOWE

TOWN OF SHERMAN