

FIRST SELECTMAN COLUMN

08/03/23 ISSUE DATE

I can deliver good news regarding our 2022/23 budget that is now, with the exception of a couple items, nearly wrapped up: We will end this fiscal year in the black

as every budget in the last 6 years has been. (Budgets previous to this by other Boards of Selectmen also came in with surpluses too; I don't have those numbers at hand. Sherman through the years, thankfully, has been a diligent town financially.)

Creating a budget is one of the most challenging duties for the Board of Selectmen (BOS) and its financial team partners. The BOS always tries to, yes, budget enough, but also not budget more than is needed as to pass any unnecessary tax burden on to taxpayers. Properly executed, the end of the year numbers should reflect a surplus (in the black), but not too large of one because that would indicate we over-budgeted. The fact that our team has reduced taxes by 12 percent over the last six years, nearly doubled our surplus (Rainy Day Fund), increased services, and managed every budget into the black, fills me with gratitude for all of the amazing people I work with who do good on behalf of the Town.

Don't forget to include Happy Acres Farm when you are in the market for meat, eggs, and vegetables. David Jellen, our farmer, has a wonderful array of goodies at his farm stand that are fresh and ready for purchase and pickup. Currently, the resurfacing, repair, and painting of the remaining Happy Acres buildings is underway. This will complete our board's "phase 2" of our plan, which was to stabilize the farmstead and bring much needed order to this Town-owned entity. Phase 3 will include making the farm a more public entity with an additional push towards tourism. This phase has begun.

It is rare for a municipality to own a working farm. (That statement is pretty obvious!) One local example of a Town-owned farm with public participation is the spectacular Ambler Farm in Wilton. Prior to our board's changing Happy Acres Farm for the better, I toured Ambler, which is 22 acres in size compared to the 90 acres that Sherman voted to own at Happy Acres. Ambler is managed by a farmer, but also incorporates other staff members such as a director of programming. Frankly, I'm not certain that Ambler Farm is exactly what we would like Happy Acres to one day be, but there are some aspects of it that include the public for which we might strive for in the near future years. Meanwhile, David who works tirelessly at maintaining the farm both as a working farm and also aesthetically, has been gracious to host various youth organizations to tour and enjoy the "farm" experience.

An important BOS Special Meeting took place on Tuesday, Aug 1. It came up suddenly by request of the Sherman Building Committee and the Board of Education (BOE). The meeting, called by the BOS, will include Sherman School Building Committee members as well as BOE members. The topic is the renovation and repair of the Sherman School now that the building committee has settled on a plan. We will be discussing timelines, financial details, outreach, and other aspects of this important project. Expect my next column to report on the facts and nuances of the decisions facing the voting public regarding the Sherman School renovation.

We have faced our first prolonged heat wave. Please be careful when you utilize our lakes and rivers as ways to stay cool. Sadly, our area has experienced drownings in local towns and we avoided disaster last week as our Sherman Volunteer Fire Department rescued two individuals from the Housatonic River. Please take care as you take to the water, wear life preservers, and don't engage in risky maneuvers out of your swim skill range. And stay out of the rivers for swimming. Rivers are beautiful, enticing, but dangerously unpredictable for swimmers.



DON LOWE

TOWN OF SHERMAN