

## **Town Manager**

### **Kenneth E. Walto**

Fiscally, Two Thousand and Three was a difficult year characterized by decreasing state aid, rising expenses and a steep hike in the average tax assessment. For the first time in many years, the town had a net outflow from its reserves. The budget process began in earnest in January 2003 and was finally completed with the setting of the tax rate after the October Special Town Meeting. Finance Committee Chairman Terry Williams was especially helpful throughout this endeavor sharing his many years of experience, data and insights. I thank him for that.

In March the town was presented with five new or revised by-laws at a Special Town Meeting. It approved all but one. Two significant new by-laws were enacted to provide for cluster residential development and the control of unwanted noise. By-laws that control junk cars and the plowing of snow onto public ways were amended. The town rejected a by-law requiring residents to remove snow from their sidewalks.

The Board of Health completed its first full year. Two new members were added: Drew Finn, P.E., and Dr. Dan Doyle joined Cora Cooney, Bob Betit and Atty. Rich O'Brien. Thanks to all of you for agreeing to serve. Health Agent, Ed Fahey passed his state exam and is now a Registered Sanitarian. This is an important professional credential and a first for Dalton to have a Registered Sanitarian on staff. Congratulations Ed.

In May of 2002, the Library was awarded a \$20,000 grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners; this grant was combined with a \$40,000 appropriation. Hill Engineers, Architects and Planners was retained—after a very competitive process—to determine the most feasible location for a 30,000 square foot Library and Senior Center. Four sites are being studied, including the former Dalton High School on Glennon Avenue and the existing library. The study is expected to be completed early in 2004. A committee composed of Larry Gingras, Ken Walto, Gus Schnopp, Judy Brooks, Sue Jacobs, Dory Lamica, Robin Higgins, Mary Ellen Shea, Mary Jane Caliento, and Gale Pinna was created to help select the consultant and oversee the study. Thank you for your hard work.

The Development and Industrial Commission continued its effort to spur economic development and made several very important strides as more fully explained in its report. Three new members joined that board: Gus Schnopp, Tim Kiely, and Steve Sears. Thank you for your time and effort.

The Select Board adopted a \$10,956,000 five-year capital plan in June that covers Police, Parks/Cemeteries, Highway/Sewers and General Government capital needs. Funding for the plan is expected to be primarily from a combination of three sources: debt, reserve funds and state funding. Approximately fifty percent of that total is expected to come from the state for the reconstruction of Housatonic and South Streets. Those

projects have reached the 25% design stage. The Massachusetts Highway Department held a hearing on South Street and is expected to hold a hearing on Housatonic Street in the summer of 2004. In June, the town approved funding for the current year of the Capital Plan; \$364,000 of five-year debt and \$82,000 in reserve funds was authorized and appropriated.

The Select Board also adopted the Town's first Classification and Compensation Policy for non-represented employees, based upon a report of the Mass Municipal Association Consulting Group. The town, at the June Special Town Meeting, funded that plan.

Also, personal services agreements were negotiated with the Highway Superintendent, Highway General Foreman and Police Sergeant. Those agreements were funded at the October Special Town Meeting.

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission continued its planning assistance to the town with special efforts on behalf of the Development and Industrial Commission. The BRPC also prepared a mandated Storm Water Management Notice of Intent, which was for submitted in July to the Federal Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Through the superior efforts of Police Chief Dan Filiault, the town was awarded a \$250,000 Federal Grant for a program known as COPS in Schools. Two police officers were hired to replace two who have been placed full time at Nessacus Middle School and Wahconah. High School.

I thank the town's employees whose continued dedication and cooperation is evident in the smoothly functioning municipal government. Likewise, I thank the town's many boards and commissions who labor without compensation for love of the community.

I want to especially thank the Select Board for its continued support. The Town Manager form of government cannot work well without the close and continuing collaboration of the Select Board and Town Manager. I also thank our joint Administrative Assistant whose ever-cheerful disposition is a hit with the mob at town hall.