

## **Lincoln Town Manager Annual Report for 2006**

It's been a little over 4 ½ years that I have been the Town Manager of Lincoln. The most interesting aspect of my work is learning more of the history and the people of this community. Having lived in this community for approximately 20 years, I learn a little more every day about the mill days and the importance of those days to all of the long-time residents of the Town of Lincoln. The decisions I have to make on a daily basis have to take into consideration the necessity for maintaining this community and the way that its history has developed it. There are so many changes that are taking place, but we maintain the philosophy that we definitely do not want to lose our small town quality.

My job, consisting not only of being Town Manager, but also working as town planner, means giving direction and managing all of the development that is going on in the community. I do this by working together with the Chairman of the Planning Board (Pat Romprey), the Selectman Representative to the Planning Board (Peter Moore), and all the other members of the Planning Board, as well as the Town's Engineers, to maintain this philosophy. There are many issues pulling us in various directions, and the one thing that helps us to maintain a steady course is the input that the Planning Board, the Selectmen and I receive from the members of this community. It's interesting, also, that a lot of the new residents who have made Lincoln their new home have adopted this philosophy and are very enthusiastic and involved in helping us keep this philosophy a reality. There had been a division between the old and the new, and the interesting observation is that the new residents are as interested in maintaining this same small town quality as the original citizens.

Our livelihood depends on tourism; skiing, snowmobiling, hiking, fishing, hunting, etc. I believe we can develop this town by working together with the developers to maintain this small town quality, which is what makes us who we are. This is not an easy task in that so many people have so many different ideas and directions in which they feel this town should go, but if we continue to all work together, I believe that we will accomplish this goal.

One of the major issues before us, which has been ongoing for many years, has been the volume of traffic on our Main Street. Our traffic plan, which has been developed through the Loon Mountain ski area expansion plan and the Centex Development Plan (paid for by Centex Destination Properties), I feel will require the least amount of change to Main Street. The main component of this traffic plan is the re-stripping of the intersections along Main Street. Turning lanes will be striped or painted to better organize traffic and give direction to the flow of traffic. These plans have been reviewed by the town traffic engineer, the Lincoln Planning Board, your Selectboard and the State Department of Transportation, and we feel that this traffic plan, while bringing about the least amount of change to the existing Main Street, will provide us with better traffic flow through the town. One of the necessary areas for a new traffic signal, of the School Board's concern and our concern, has now been corroborated by the NH DOT's recommendation of a traffic signal at the intersection of InnSeasons South Mountain Village Shops (formerly

the mill) and the LinWood School, with pedestrian control of the lights, to make it a safer crossing for the children. One of the most important aspects of this intersection will be the opportunity for the people on the south side of Main Street to enter into the traffic during high volume times.

I am continually working together with the Selectmen's Board, the Planning Board, and the developers on looking to the future for necessary changes in our infrastructure. My job is to coordinate all these entities so we can maintain control over our future. Yes, we have agreements with the developers in town to pay for the water and sewer, traffic and fire improvements, but we also need to look back and remember that a downturn in the economy, as history can repeat itself, is a possibility, and we want to be prepared for the slow times. Therefore, we need to manage for the lows and the highs. So far, when other areas in the real estate market have been experiencing a downturn, there has not been as drastic a change in the real estate market in our Town of Lincoln, but we still include that possibility in our planning. For example, in this time of growth, we must not forget the need for additional housing opportunities for our seniors and middle-income residents, similar to complexes like our Lincoln Green.

The Town of Lincoln is very unique, and has just reached a new milestone in the state of New Hampshire in that our \$8-per-thousand tax rate is one of the lowest in the state. This tax rate is comprised, in part, of \$3.04 for the town operating and capital expense budget, which we have been able to hold to approximately a 3%-3.5% increase each year. This has been accomplished by maintaining very controlled individual department budgets, but still being able to make streets, drainage, water and sewer improvements, sustain an excellent recreation program for our children and purchase and improve the community center.

The next portion of our tax is the \$3.84 that represents our portion of the school tax. Lincoln's share of this tax is based on the value of the property in the town of Lincoln, which is approximately \$810 million, and on the 60/40 formula that is presently in place. This means 60% of LinWood School's costs are paid by Lincoln and 40% by Woodstock based on the total property value in those two communities. However, since Lincoln's values are so much higher than Woodstock, and continue to increase, there are some inequities in the proportion of the formula. For instance, the town of Lincoln pays \$3.1 million to the LinWood School, and Woodstock pays \$1.6 million. However, Woodstock receives \$293,899 in targeted aid from the state, bringing Woodstock's portion to \$1.3 million actually coming out of their taxes. We are not asking Woodstock to pay that much more, we are only asking that the formula be adjusted, because if Lincoln's property values continue to escalate every year, as they have, we will continue to pay a larger portion of the overall cost of the school and there needs to be some adjustment to maintain a more equitable proportion. The costs can escalate 20% and higher in the next five years.

The final portion that we continue to look at is the county tax, which at present is \$1.12 per thousand. We have very little to no control over this figure. The county government is a very old system and operates primarily with three commissioners running the county

government, Ray Burton being our representative, and state representatives acting in the legislature. I have been continually monitoring their actions and work very closely together with our state representative, Edmond Gionet. He and I are trying to control the spending of this county government. It's very difficult, as we only have one vote via our one representative.

The County still operates a jail, which is very antiquated. I visited that jail and realized the need for its replacement. However, the size of this new jail is our biggest concern, together with the fact that this new one has not been planned or budgeted for. Currently, the plan is to build a new jail much larger than the existing jail. How does that saying go, "Build it, and they will come"? From my perspective, the size of the jail helps to control the number of inmates that are incarcerated there. No-one can be in the county jail for sentences of more than one year. Inmates cost us \$24,000 per year to keep them there. 95% of the men and women locked up in the county jail are there because of drug or alcohol issues. Maybe it would be better to spend this \$24,000 per year on rehabilitation, abuse prevention and finding alternative ways to help these individuals, rather than putting them in jail.

The county farm should also be of concern to us. The operating cost of that alone is \$400,000 per year. One thing my father always told me was that if I didn't behave, I would be sent to the county farm. It seems to me that in those 60 years, we should have figured out a more modern way to rehabilitate and retrain.

There are some excellent benefits of county government. The sheriff's department supplements our Lincoln Police Department, the nursing home is excellent, and we support the system in general.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this report, we have tried to react to and manage the requests, suggestions and comments from all of you, the citizens and taxpayers. I realize that oftentimes, people don't think that their feelings are being included in the larger scheme of things, but that is not at all true. We, the Board of Selectmen and I, as well as the Budget Committee and Planning Board, always welcome and need your input. I'm always available and welcome your involvement in your town's government, by attending and participating in any of these board meetings, or visiting with me at any time.

Thank you for allowing me to do this work for you!

Respectfully submitted,

Ted Sutton  
Town Manager