

Annual Report of the Board of Selectmen

This past year, the Board said goodbye to two term selectman David "Rabbitt" Haskell who passed away on June 9th, 2006 at the end of his second term. Rabbitt was a public servant in the most classic sense. He always carried a notebook where he would pencil in resident's concerns so that he could check on them personally. Some people have their "PDA" to electronically keep track of dates and reminders, Rabbitt always commented that his "PAD" served him just as well or better and "didn't need any batteries!" During Rabbitt's tenure, the Select Board tried to acknowledge special occasions in citizens' lives with a formal letter of thanks or congratulations. It was Rabbitt's idea to make these letters "suitable for framing" as he liked to say. He was one of a kind and we will all miss him.

The Board welcomed former selectman, Jeff Ciuffreda, who replaced Rabbitt Haskell. Jeff's valuable experience will serve the town well in the years to come. The Board was re-organized with Eric Cerreta as Chairman and Denise Banister as Clerk.

The Board of Selectmen spent most of 2006 dealing with the re-organization of our financial department due to the resignations of Kimberly Hyslip as Town Accountant and Karen Karowski as Town Treasurer. After Hyslip's replacement, Donna Allard's short tenure, the Board hired the Franklin Regional Council of Governments for Town Accountant services. We feel that this will give us more continuity as we will be relying on the FRCOG and not an individual. We have the added bonus of having Janet Swem oversee our accounting needs as representative of the FRCOG. As some of you may remember, Janet served Williamsburg very well as Town Accountant several years ago.

The Select Board also appointed Peter Mahieu as Treasurer in November of 2006 and we have been pleased with his work ethic and abilities. Peter has spent many hours learning the outdated software that has been used here for many years and is working on converting to a more modern windows based program for the future. We thank him for stepping up to the plate and taking on this difficult task.

Our operating budget was a challenge, as it has been for several years. As you may remember, our assessment at Hampshire Regional continues to rise at a faster rate than the other four towns due to a formula change that was instituted by the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) a few years ago. Our very vocal objections to this by elected officials and some dedicated residents have put this issue on the radar for the DOE. We don't however feel that it will be solved to any great degree soon enough to help with next year's budget. In order to deal with the reality of this difficult situation, we have been forced to once again level fund the budgets in town to cope with the loss of revenue. We appreciate the sacrifices that our department heads have been making, but we don't feel that we can continue in this trend without services provided by the town being affected more drastically.

An important project that has been going on throughout 2006/2007 is the renovation of our Veterans' Memorial Park. Work was started in 2005 by Rabbitt Haskell and Butch Smith to add wings to the memorial for newer veterans to be memorialized in the future. After Rabbitt became ill, several of his friends and fellow Vietnam Veterans came forward to finish the project. Butch Smith and Jim Lebeau finished adding the wings. Local landscape architect Nick Dines drew some plans for some updating of the patio, flagpoles and plantings. Joel Strate and his staff laid the new Goshen stone for the patio that was donated by Gary Warner's Goshen Stone Company. Our local Highway Department has been there every time machinery or manpower has been needed as well. Local businesses have been generous with donations to pay for the flagpoles and other expenses. It has been a pleasure to watch all of the people who have contributed to this worthy project and for them to do so in Rabbitt's memory. I'm sure he would be touched.

The Select Board would like to express our thanks and appreciation to everyone who gives of their time and talents to make our Williamsburg the special place it is to live.

Eric P. Cerreta, Chairman