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Thomaston Town Newsletter
P.O. Box 299 ~ Thomaston, Maine 04861
(207) 354-6107

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VOLUME 24 ISSUE 3

JUNE 2019

JUNE ELECTIONS

MUNICIPAL ELECTION, RSU #13 SCHOOL BUDGET REFERENDUM, & ANNUAL TOWN MEETING TO BE HELD AT

THE AMERICAN LEGION HALL, 10 WATTS LANE

Tuesday, June 11, 2019 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. is the Municipal Referendum and the RSU #13 Budget Referendum Election. The Municipal Referendum Ballot includes Article 2 to elect two Select Board members for 3-year terms each and one Board of Assessor Member for a 3-year term. Article 3 asks voters: *"Shall the town vote to disband the Thomaston Police Department and to authorize the Selectmen to contract with the Knox County Sheriff's Department to provide police protection to the Town of Thomaston at such terms and conditions as the Selectmen deem appropriate?"*

Absentee Ballots for the Municipal Referendum Election are available now through **Thursday, June 6, 2019** without a special circumstance. Please call 354-6107, visit www.thomastonmaine.us, or stop by the Town Office to request a ballot.

Wednesday, June 12, 2019 at 7:00 P.M. is the Annual Town Meeting to vote by open floor on Articles 4-47 of the Town Meeting Warrant.

Please check out the Town website at: www.thomastonmaine.us to view the full Town Meeting Warrant, Police Referendum documents, and the proposed ordinance changes for the Budget Committee, Chapter 7 Land Use & Definitions, Personnel Committee, and the Village Cemetery Ordinance amendments. All documents are also available at the Town Office.

Thomaston Recreation Senior Citizen Trip July 8th

Boothbay Botanical Gardens

Sign up begins June 1st at the Thomaston Town Office. The bus leaves St. George at 8:30am and picks up in Thomaston at 8:45am, behind the Business Block. Estimated arrival at the Gardens is 9:45am. After arriving at the Gardens, there will be a guided tour before lunch. For lunch, seniors may bring a bag lunch or purchase lunch at the café there. Estimated return to Thomaston 3:30pm and St. George 3:45pm.

Thomaston Police Department

On June 30th of 2018, the Thomaston Police Department was 100% staffed. Yet, somehow the Town found itself on March 30th of 2019 with no staff other than the Police Chief. After four months of deliberation from November to March, the fourth officer resigned on January 21st, 2019 while he was attending the Maine Criminal Justice Academy as a Thomaston Police Officer and was hired by Knox County. Therefore, all three of Thomaston's resigned officers are now employees of Knox County and Thomaston has a department of one, the Police Chief. Reserve Officers and Knox County Sheriff's Department are providing the remaining coverage.

I completed an analysis of staff turnover in the Police Department for the years 2000 through 2018 for a total of 19 years. I would note the first five years from 2000-2004 is when the Town provided full family health insurance. During this time, the average vacancy rate in months was 6.8 months average per year out of the 48 months with four patrol officers filling 12 months each at 100% with no vacancies. Then I reviewed the same criteria for the years 2014-2018. The last five years without full family health insurance, the average vacancy rate was 7.6 months. There is less than one month average per year difference when there was family insurance and currently, single employees only coverage.

Analysis Results of Thomaston Police Department

The seven officers that came and left in the past 14 months with only four slots to fill was not due to the lack of family health insurance coverage alone. In the Town Manager's opinion, the resignations were from internal management that was continuously stating that the Select Board's decision not to fund full family health insurance without considering the cost to taxpayers was part of the reason. All seven Patrol Officers hired were advised of wage and benefits prior to taking the positions. Thomaston Police Officer wages start at \$46,727. Knox County Sheriff's Officer wages start at \$40,622. Thomaston pays 18.5% on top of the wages towards retirement (social security and Maine Public Employees Retirement System) Knox County pays 14.8% for retirement. Thomaston currently has single only health insurance. Knox County offers a family health insurance plan. The Thomaston Board of Selectmen need to weigh the cost of all 19 employees receiving full family health and not just coverage for the four patrol officers which is an increase cost to the tax payers of approximately \$150,000. Of the nine member Union, there are only 5 members in mediation with the Department of Labor and as there are 4 police member vacancies.

The issue before the voters on June 11, 2019 will be to disband the Thomaston Police Department or not to. This was not an issue my office raised. Therefore, I have only attempted to assist the Select Board to answer the questions. I believe the documents provided will outline the Town's costs depending on the resolution of the Union contract currently in mediation before the State of Maine Department of Labor. Documents are available on the Town Website: www.thomastonmaine.us.

Sheriff Tim Carroll has submitted a proposal to cover the Town with dedicated law enforcement officers seven days a week with two shifts per day at a cost of \$450,000 and a one-year draft contract. To maintain the Thomaston Police Department as it exists, costs range from \$572,543.67 to \$620,525.91 based on an average of 6 different full family health insurance plans through Maine Municipal Employee Health Trust. The costs for the current union provided Allegiant Care full family health care plan would be \$632,461.51.

Based on Sheriff Tim Carroll's submission, a starting officer's total wage and benefit is \$50,431 annually. Thomaston's is \$61,095.17 annually. Therefore, the real discussion beyond costs clearly goes back to the expectations of the citizens in regards to the level of service to be provided vs. the level the Town received in the past. This question is posed to Thomaston Police Chief Tim Hoppe and Sheriff Tim Carroll.

Education

RSU #13 Projections from a year ago

(Excerpt from the 2017 Audit: Town Management Discussion and Analysis)

"The Thomaston Town Manager made a request of RSU #13 for the upcoming potential impact on the 2018/2019 Budget. There are several factors that are concerning the Town that may significantly increase the RSU #13 Budget. These factors include:

1. A potential first payment in the amount of \$1,750,000 this year for the Future of our Schools Project.
2. A 2 to 3 year lapsed employee union contract was settled with retroactive pay.
3. General annual increases in the operating budget.

It is the Town's concern that these increases could total as much as \$3,100,000. This is figured conservatively by estimating an additional 3% for payroll for each of the three years of the union contract with the Town estimating a payroll of \$15,000,000, which would be \$450,000 a year for 3 years or \$1,350,000 in addition to the \$1,750,000 payment mentioned above. Thomaston's share of a \$3,100,000 increase would be approximately 18% or \$558,000 without the addition of the annual increase in the operating budget. RSU #13 had projected a saving of \$2,190,000 annually from addressing the Facilities issue in the District by 2019."

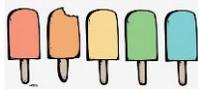
If this is not daunting enough, there is a \$628,614 State of Maine subsidy overpayment from last year being charged to Rockland and Thomaston of \$416,506 and \$212,108 respectively. Thomaston taxpayers paid a \$349,885 increase last year and with the \$212,108 subsidy overpayment, the total is \$561,993 last year. With payments totaling \$548,992 this year, the total in just two years is \$1,100,985. This is equal to two additional Police Departments plus the one we have. Clearly something is changing in the minds of those approving projects versus the true reality of the cost based on Citizens' abilities to pay.

The End, Valmore Blastow Jr., Town Manager

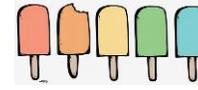
TOWN OF THOMASTON

P O BOX 299

THOMASTON, ME 04861



JUNE



MON 8AM-5PM	TUE 8AM-5PM	WED 8AM-5PM	THU 8AM-5PM	FRI 8AM-2PM
3-June Shellfish Comm. 6:30pm W.H. Fire Station 6:30pm	4-June	5-June Comp Plan Watts Hall 6:30pm	6-June Historical Research Group Watts Hall 7:00pm	7-June
10-June Select Board Mtg. Watts Hall 7:00pm	11-June VOTE! Elections 8am-8pm American Legion	12-June Town Meeting American Legion 7:00pm	13-June Joint Clam Board Watts Hall 6:00pm	14-June
17-June	18-June Planning Board Watts Hall 6:00pm	19-June Comp Plan Watts Hall 6:30pm	20-June Historical Research Group Watts Hall 6:00pm	21-June
24-June Select Board Mtg. Watts Hall 7:00pm	25-June	26-June	27-June	28-June Watts Hall Community Player's Performance Once Upon a Mattress