

## Good Time to Plan

We are all feeling the pinch from the downturn in our economy. Energy, fuel and food costs are up and affecting disposable income levels. As you are doing at home, we are working to conserve where we can and are taking a close look at our budgets to find ways to cut back. How long will this last? History shows that a recovery will come, but some predict that the downward trend might continue well into next year.

So what do we do while we wait for the economy to recover? I believe this is a good time to plan for the future. The Board of Selectmen is in the process of identifying and prioritizing capital projects. Through a series of public hearings and meetings, you and we have expressed a desire for an improved public safety facility, a senior/community center, more open space, and an improved Public Works facility. Add to that fleet replacement, town property and infrastructure maintenance, and communication improvements and upgrades. By far, the most input we received revolved around the public safety improvements and the Senior/Community Center. There are multiple funding mechanisms through state and federal grants to help us achieve our goals. However, we have missed several opportunities because our projects were not "ready to go". Towns that are most successful in receiving grant awards have projects studied, engineered and planned so that when a grant is announced it can easily be determined if the project meets the criteria. Even projects that are completed in phases can be funded with grants if qualified and ready.

Last month, the Board of Selectmen took an important step towards readiness for the building of a Senior/Community Center. After almost 10 years, 19 site walks and 14 private property inquiries, the Durham Senior Citizen Board requested that the Board of Selectman pursue the purchase of almost 7 acres at the corner of Meetinghouse Hill Road and New Haven Road. The Board of Finance confirmed that there are sufficient funds available through reserve and fund balance accounts; a town meeting was held and a referendum planned for July 1, 2008. Once the site is secured, we can determine the scope, details, timing and funding for the project, something that has been difficult to do without knowing where the building would be located.

My hope is that you vote yes at the July 1 referendum. I will then propose that the Board of Selectmen appoint three new committees, one to create workable and realistic plans for the Senior/Community Center and one to do the same for the improvements to the public safety facility at the firehouse site to include the renovations of the two town-owned houses. I will also propose a separate committee which will have the sole responsibility of researching grant opportunities. In this day and age, it is not unusual to fund municipal projects using several different sources. It takes a great deal of time and effort to determine eligibility and to write grant applications. A committee that can augment the work done by town hall staff will greatly increase our chances of receiving grant awards in an ever increasing competitive arena.