

Now that the town has a new budget as of July 1 let me update you on a number of current and planned town projects. Although funds have been appropriated for a project doesn't mean work will begin immediately. Nevertheless, I, along with many of you, am sometimes frustrated by the slow pace of some projects. On the other hand, haste can sometimes cause waste, which we all want to avoid.

The installation of larger utility poles on US 64, from around Maple Street to Highlands Falls, to support a third electric circuit for the town is progressing faster than scheduled. Crews have already placed the poles at the corner of US 64 and Cullasaja Drive. They have also started the installations near Highlands Falls.

Once this circuit is activated in the fall, our public works director, Lamar Nix, wants to keep the momentum going and build a fourth circuit. This next plan would require installing larger poles on US 64 starting at the Duke transfer station near the Hicks Road intersection and extending the installation into downtown. This fourth and final circuit would complete the electrician grid upgrade, which has been much needed to handle future electrical demand and manage the grid during outages caused by storms. These upgrades will have cost the town several million dollars in essential reserve expenditures.

The Dog Mountain Water Project was recently sent out for bid, and one bid came in slightly under budget. A contingency fund can now be earmarked for any unforeseen problems in construction. Our staff is now waiting for the state to review the low bid and give its approval before the contractor, Stillwell Enterprises, gets the green light to begin work. Hopefully, the state will approve the bid any day now. I get nervous when the state is reviewing construction documents, as delays can occur.

The new budget also funds several paving projects. The town policy has always been to delay these paving projects until after Labor Day and toward the end of leaf season. They will get underway around the middle of October and end sometime in early November.

The first phase of the Mirror Lake Dredging Project is ongoing and is expected to conclude in the fall. It has been a slow and deliberate process, but on the other hand, it has reduced the environmental impact on the lake. McGill Associates, the engineering company hired by the town, continues to perform design work for the next stages of the project, which will involve the use of state funds. Their work will continue into the fall. We project that dredging operations for Phase Two will begin in the first part of 2026 and continue for an extended period. In many ways, the dredging for the subsequent phases is significantly larger and more complex than Phase One.

CK Dixon Engineering continues to work on the design and bid documents for upgrades to the town water plant. In addition to replacing the pre-clarifier tank, a third filter train will be

added to the plant. While state funds cover the pre-clarifier tank and part of the filter train installation, we are exploring the possibility of securing additional outside funding to fully fund these upgrades.

Finally, this year, the project to replace critical parts of the force main sewer line on US 64, from the Mirror Lake area to the business district, will get underway. It is a high-priority project that is being funded by the town, allowing it to be completed without undue delays and approvals. Engineering reports and studies conducted by CK Dixon identify areas of the pipeline that have to be replaced. This project will get underway in the winter months when traffic volume will be at the lowest level of the year.