



# WESTFORD

MASSACHUSETTS

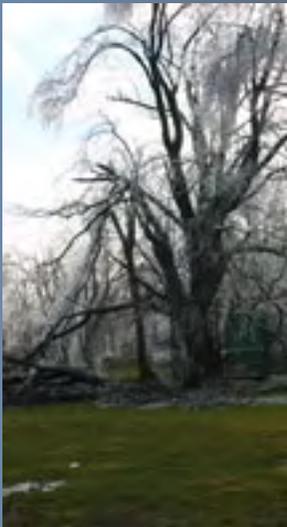
## Town Manager's Newsletter

January 2009



Jodi Ross  
Town Manager  
978-692-5500

### Ice Storm 2008



The Ice Storm of '08 was an experience that most of us hope will never be repeated. Many Westford residents were without power from a few days to a full week. Sadly, in other towns, residents went even longer without power restoration. Although I would like to believe this was an once-in-a-lifetime event, I am concerned that this type of storm may happen more frequently with changing weather patterns.

Therefore, what we plan to do is take proactive, preventative steps to improve our situation if a similar storm does occur. Our public safety and other departments are debriefing, recapping, analyzing, and recommending improvements in our town's readiness and response. Many of you asked for us to find other ways to communicate with you, or improve the methods we already have in place. We plan to do so. We are also asking National Grid to provide us with a recap of their response and help us to understand how, why, and under what timeline they responded, and what can be done to improve their ability to restore power more quickly in such an outage. One thing I learned is that Westford seems to experience greater numbers of power outages than neighboring towns, and this is something we need to investigate, and find a solution to.

The selectmen will be forming a new Energy Committee who will also be charged with analyzing National Grid's response to this recent storm, and why neighboring communities were able to restore power so much sooner than National Grid. In this analysis, we will also ask whether the town should consider switching to another supplier. After the storm we received interest from several volunteers willing to serve on this committee. Thank you to all who applied and I hope this committee will be formed at the selectmen's January 13<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Currently we are actively seeking FEMA and MEMA reimbursement for our costs incurred from the storm. Due to the fact that these reimbursements are based upon county figures, and much of Middlesex County was unaffected by the storm, we have to date been denied reimbursement. This was unacceptable to us as most of our surrounding counties, and counties in New Hampshire were approved. We have organized with our neighboring communities who were in similar situations, and have called our local and state officials and others to assist us in overturning this decision. We have a meeting scheduled for January 14<sup>th</sup> in Westford where we will all work together to seek the assistance we believe we deserve.

Please tune in to the January 27<sup>th</sup> Board of Selectmen meeting where individuals, companies, and departments will be commended for their actions during this storm. Although we certainly will miss some who helped their neighbors or friends, or contributed in many ways unbeknownst to us, we will attempt to recognize several that we have learned about who really assisted when we or others needed it most.

In closing, I again would like to express my deepest gratitude to all who went above-and-beyond to assist others during this terrible event. I want to recognize the bravery of our town employees in the fire, police, and highway departments. These folks risked their lives keeping our roads safe and passable for public safety vehicles. Even when their own homes were cold and dark, or their own basements were flooded, they persevered on the job to protect Westford residents. I would also like to thank (again) those of you who took the time to write or call me with thanks for how the town handled the storm. It was certainly nice to hear positive comments and messages of thanks - particularly at a time when most of our patience had run thin. Those who offered constructive criticism, I will certainly take your comments seriously and attempt to improve in the future. Again, happy new year to you all!

Sincerely,

Jodi Ross



## Ice Storm 2008 – Fire Department

The December Ice Storm came with a furry for the Fire Department-- losing power early during the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup>, causing the department to hold onto staff to address multiple calls. In some cases each of the three fire stations was isolated from one another impeding personnel from getting from one part of town to the other. Faced with these challenges, the department decided to maintain additional staff in place until such time that the major roads openings were made possible.

Fire department personnel along with other agencies within the town started to open up a shelter for residents in the town. Major departments met each day to collaborate about strategies and implementation plans for the coming hours and days.

In addition to shelter openings we faced

the challenges of checking on our high risk residents; our elderly population to provide transportation if needed to our shelters. Both the Fire and Police departments were faced with the possibility of loss of our primary communications because of the use of our auxiliary power and the backup generator running out of fuel. We evaded the problem due largely because of plans that we had put in place several years ago that we were able to implement and insure that we had it in place for communication.

While we dealt with the other issues we found ourselves dealing with secondary issues that began to present themselves to us such as water problem in residents basements, and carbon monoxide issues because of people seeking alternative methods

of trying to keep themselves warm as well as having a house fire. In addition we needed to work out a solution to work with the many businesses that had no power and the prevention of their sprinkler systems from freezing.

While the many departments collaborated on efforts to be self sufficient for days until additional resources came to the town to restore power we slowly returned to normal. While we know no system will be perfect, we will be looking at ways to improve how we deal with these types of interruptions to our community in the future and thank all of the people and staff that helped us and others get through this event.



*The shelter at Blanchard Middle School was staffed at all times with police, fire, and medical and administrative MRC personnel. Shelter residents received meals provided by the school kitchen staff.*



## Ice Storm 2008 – Police Department

The most significant impact of the December 2008 Ice Storm upon the Westford Police Department was felt in our Dispatch/ Communications Center. From Thursday December 11 to Thursday December 18 the Police Department dispatchers answered approximately 3576 calls. That number represents approximately a 700% increase in call volume for the same time period during an average week. Of those calls 277 of them were 911 emergency calls which represents a 400% increase in 911 calls for the same time period during an average week. Dispatch personnel were assisted by shift commanders and 911 certified administrative staff from the Police Records Dept. who was temporarily reassigned during this massive effort.

In the early morning hours of Friday December 12 during the height of the storm, Sgt. Marc Proia exited his patrol car to remove a tree that was blocking the roadway. As he was doing this another tree fell onto his patrol car causing \$3,300.00 damage to the vehicle. Three police traffic barricades were damaged and two others went missing at the end of the week. Sgt. Proia was not injured nor were any other police personnel injured during the storm or its aftermath.

Additionally, Chief McEnaney ordered in to duty additional officers and held others over beyond their normal tours to handle the increase in calls and to address the obvious public safety concerns of the storm's aftermath. These officers worked with Westford's Council on Aging staff and checked on numerous elderly

residents at their homes every day. A police officer was assigned to the Blanchard School Shelter 24/7 for security and coordination with other town departments. All leave for officers was cancelled as fatigue became a factor while maintaining the necessary staffing response.

Chief McEnaney coordinated an emergency response procedure with Highway Superintendent Barrett by positioning heavy equipment in key areas around town in order to remove trees and debris from the roadway that would be blocking emergency access to residents in need.



*“From Thursday December 11 to Thursday December 18 the Police Department dispatchers answered approximately 3576 calls.”*



## Ice Storm 2008 – Water Department

On Thursday, December 11, 2008 at 9:50 PM, the Forge Village Water Treatment Facility and two wells lost power. By 3:30 AM Friday, both Water Treatment Facilities (WTFs) and a total of 4 out of 8 wells and 3 out of 5 storage tanks were without power. At that time the generators at both WTFs went online.

worked Friday to manually start a natural gas engine at one of the wells and to hook up temporary power to one of the tanks through which all radio communications from wells and tanks run. However, the water level in storage could still only be monitored in 2 of the 5 tanks.

At 9:18 AM on Monday, December 15, 2008, 2 of the 3 wells that supply the Nutting Road WTF had power and the WTF was restarted using its generator. Following this, the generator at one of the wells feeding the Forge Village WTF was turned off. This would allow both WTFs to be operated automatically.

With the Forge Village WTF and one well operating under two different generators, the water system could not be run automatically. Any shutdowns and restarts of equipment would have to be done manually at each site. At 10:30 AM on Friday, the system was pumping about 1,000 gallons per minute, which in a 24 hour period matches the typical water demand in the winter.

By Tuesday afternoon the WTFs were still under generator power, and 3 out of 8 wells still did not have power.

At 12:00 AM on Wednesday, December 17, 2008, power was restored to the entire system. All use of generators was discontinued. At no time during the storm, or during the days after the storm, was water service ever affected. Water storage levels, fire flows, and water service to customers were never impacted or interrupted. Please contact the Water Department at 978-692-5529 if you have any questions or concerns.

Despite having a generator, the Nutting Road WTF could not be used because Cote Well was the only well out of 3 that supply this facility that had power. The perchlorate treatment system on the Cote Well can only be operated at 200 gallons per minute. At that slow a rate, and with the extreme change in water quality caused by using only one well, it was not feasible or efficient to operate the Nutting Road WTF.

At 2:00 PM on Friday, Mass DEP called to see how things were running and was pleased to hear that with the available wells (now 4) feeding Forge Village WTF, things were under control.

Therefore, by 7:30 AM Friday, only the Forge Village WTF was running with three wells still operating. Water Department Staff



*As we head into the snowy winter months, we again ask for your assistance in keeping access to fire hydrants clear. It is so important to public safety to keep the hydrants accessible. After storms, it can sometimes be a few days before Town crews can clear the snow away, so any help you can offer is greatly appreciated.*



## Ice Storm 2008 – Health Department

The Health Department responded to last month's ice storm on several levels.

In her role as Director of the Upper Merrimack Valley Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), the Health Care Services Director activated MRC volunteers to staff the town's emergency shelter around the clock with both medical and non-medical members. The MRC provides essential additional personnel in response to a disaster, which supplements local agencies' capacity to provide services. Our MRC of 542 members provided medical and administrative coverage around the clock for 82 separate shifts. More than 45 members provided this coverage, many offering their time for several shifts. Because a number of elderly residents required special care, it was crucial to have an RN and an administrator on hand 24/7, to handle shelter operations.

During the extended power outage, specially designed cots and medical supplies obtained through a Public Health Bioterrorism grant, were used to provide more comfortable cots for our frail elderly or those who had special medical needs.

In addition, the Health Department attended daily briefings with Emergency Management, the Town Manager, Senior Center staff, Fire Department, Police Department, Highway Department, and School Department, to ensure that all public health issues were addressed. Our Food Services staff contacted retail food establishments to assure food was not compromised and provided public education on food safety. We also received numerous calls from residents concerned about the welfare of their families.

Fortunately, for the past few months, the Health Department and MRC collaborated to conduct emergency-preparedness sessions to provide residents information on how to prepare for emergencies. These sessions offered residents the opportunity to purchase 72-hour emergency kits with items purchased in bulk. Many residents have told us how handy the kit supplies were during the storm including emergency lighting which families used during the outage. For more information about the kits, contact the main health department number at 978-692-5509.

We are grateful for the dedication of all the departments, their staff, and the volunteers who came together to help in Westford during the unusually destructive ice storm. We remain impressed by the immediate response and grateful for the able collaboration shown by all involved.



*MRC members assisted as needed distributing meals and ensuring that residents were greeted warmly.*



### Ice Storm 2008 – Council on Aging

During the state of emergency that we awoke to on Friday, December 12<sup>th</sup> the Cameron Senior Center was closed to regular activities that day. Some of the Senior Center staff made themselves available initially to field phone calls and to coordinate concerns as they presented. We maintain a list of some of our residents who may require more immediate/emergency attention. One of our first acts was to try to make telephone contact with those on the emergency list to determine their safety. As problems arose during that day and in the following days, here are some of the ways that we were able to assist our seniors:

We shared our emergency list with police and fire departments who responded by contacting and going door-to-door as needed throughout the storm.

The Social Worker, Judy Ramirez, was

able to accompany public safety officials to some residents' homes and assisted them in relocating to the shelter. She maintained ongoing contact with emergency management and with the shelter staff.

Outreach calls began immediately to elders who may have a specific need and to attempt to prioritize services.

Our food pantry was utilized to supplement the shelter as needed.

Our van provided emergency transportation services to and from the shelter and the following drivers made themselves available over the weekend: John Duffett, Bill Ewers, Ed Greenwood, Laura Mathis, Al MacGilvray and Joyce Newton.

Senior Center staff made regular visits to those residents in the shelter, especially our elders, to provide support and familiar faces.

The Cameron Senior

Center opened on Sunday providing support, heat, a meal and relaxation for residents who were still without power but who had not relocated to the shelter.

On Monday and Tuesday the staff and volunteers pulled together, prepared and delivered thirty bag lunches to some homebound elders.

Assistance was provided by many staff and volunteers over the week including Claire France, Annette Cerullo, Joan Greenwood, Marjorie Hunter, Chris Mitchell, Angela Gagne, Greg Bacon, Bill Gross, Pat Hamilton, Connie King, Tim Martin, Bea Friedman and daughter, Joyce Cederberg, Linda Dureault, Jose Ramirez, Butch Newton, Helena Crocker, Trish and Pam DeMars.

***Continued on p.7***



*“Our van provided emergency transportation services to and from the shelter...”*



## Ice Storm 2008 – Council on Aging Continued from p.6

The ice storm was followed by a snow storm and we've had many requests from seniors looking for people to shovel or plow their driveways and walkways. We have partnered with students at Westford Academy for a few years, and, in the fall of 2008, 24 senior households were assigned to students to rake, shovel and provide sand. Currently we do not have additional students available to meet all of the requests, but we **strongly encourage** families and neighbors to step up, lend a hand and to check on people who may not be able to

shovel or who may have other needs.

We want to continually update our emergency list and would ask if you are a resident on oxygen, have a specific medical condition, may be at risk in the event of power outage, and would like to receive a storm call, please contact Annette Cerullo at 978-399-2326 or Judy Ramirez at 978-399-2325 to be placed on the list.

The ice storm and subsequent power outage has prompted us to remind everyone of the inclement weather policy that is followed by the

Cameron Senior Center. If, due to poor weather conditions, the Westford School System is closed, the Cameron Senior Center will not be open for activities. We urge you to be safe and call ahead at 978-692-5523 if you are unsure.

In the event of a prolonged power outage or extremely unusual weather conditions caused by storms, the Blanchard Middle School on West Street will be used as a shelter for any person that may need this service. Call Police at 978-692-2161 or Fire at 978-692-5542 if you need their assistance.



*“we **strongly encourage** families and neighbors to step up, lend a hand and to check on people who may not be able to shovel or who may have other needs.”*

## Ice Storm 2008 – Animal Control

During the ice storm, the Animal Control Department made accommodations for any animals that were displaced at Nashoba Valley Veterinary Hospital / Boarding kennel.

Some were very late

night or early morning calls, and Assistant Meg Mizzoni did a great job.

Thanks also to Nashoba Valley Veterinary Hospital / Boarding kennel for allowing us 24hr access to their facility.

Fortunately only ten animals required our assistance.

This will only further prepare us for any other crisis situations that may occur in the future



### Ice Storm 2008 – Library

#### Heat, Lights, Running (Hot) Water, Electrical Outlets...

These are not the typical offerings that send residents to the public library, but this is what beckoned Westfordians the evening of **Monday, December 15** once the J. V. Fletcher Library regained power.

While the 64-degree temperature at 6:00 p.m. was not as warm as we'd hoped for, it was 15 degrees warmer than many a Westford household still without power.

Residents arrived with cell phones and laptops to be charged, youngsters to be entertained, reading material to peruse under wattage stronger than home

kerosene lanterns, and a desire for heat, light, running water and some semblance of normality.

Losing power so close to the Winter Solstice meant illumination by candle light or lantern after 4:15 p.m., so readers arrived in droves directly after dining in crowded local restaurants.

Every arriving patron had a story – and every shared story elicited another patron's tale of survival and deprivation. (Surely this will be a class project – or a BOOK – in the making!).

From Friday morning on, Library staff walked through a frozen "Narnian" landscape to check the library facility

envelope and pipes, run water, empty book drops and mailboxes and assess (fortunately, limited) damage.

While heavy branches blocked the driveway for a day, and some damage was sustained to ornamental trees, the Champion black oak between the library and church survived yet another storm.

We thank here those other Town Departments -- Police, Fire, and Highway – that helped the Library department weather this storm as well.



*"While heavy branches blocked the driveway for a day, and some damage was sustained to ornamental trees, the Champion black oak between the library and church survived yet another storm."*



## Ice Storm 2008 – Building Department

The ice storm that hit our area had a major effect on our department. The Building Department was involved with more than 50 homes that had some type of damage to the electrical service going into the homes.

The electrical inspector was out inspecting homes from that Saturday after it hit and basically worked every day until the services were repaired and calls made to National Grid to reconnect each home had been made.

The Administrative Assistant was in constant contact with homeowners, National Grid, Electricians, and the Electrical Inspector during that time making sure that all information that we had was passed on in a timely manner to the appropriate parties involve.

The hardest part of this entire event was having residents call wanting to know why power was not back on after the inspector was out to inspect their house.

Unfortunately having to wait for power to be turned back on for some that were repaired and inspected on Monday but didn't get power back until Wednesday was hard to explain to homeowners.

For future reference, National Grid is the contact point for power after the service is reconnected. The process for our department is as follows:

Service to the house was damaged, an electrician is called for the repair, the electrician does the repair and calls the Electrical Inspector's office for an inspection.

Once we receive that call from the electrician, our office calls National Grid to inform them that the service at that address was repaired and power can be restored.

At the same time the Electrical Inspector goes out and inspects the service, if there are issues that need to be addressed the inspector will contact the electrician to get them corrected.

National Grid in the mean time will schedule a reconnect for that residence. My understanding in such large scale events for National Grid, main lines get reconnected then branch lines and then individual homes off of those lines.

That is why it took so many days in between the inspection and the power to be restored to some individual homes.



*National Grid Power Outages and Emergencies:  
1-800-465-1212*

*Westford Building Department:  
978-692-5527*