

To Town Employees and Residents of the Community,

Much has been written about the devastating impact of the harsh winter we are encountering. From the cost of snow operations to school closings to roof collapses, a day does not go by without the winter being the major topic of conversation. No one feels the strain from the winter season more than public officials dealing with these issues and having to take into consideration the desire of the general public to get on with their lives versus the need to ensure public safety. Decisions such as closing school for a day due to roads being too narrow from snow accumulation for busses to safely traverse their routes or because the snow accumulation on school roofs are exceeding building code standards for weight limits are not made easily. Everyone recognizes the disruption on school curriculum from school closures, yet at no time will we sacrifice the safety of our students, employees or residents in the decisions we make.

For the last three days a number of Town and Board of Education Officials were involved in an effort to remove snow from over 550,000 square feet of roof at our four school buildings. According to a structural engineer our school roofs were at their maximum load capacity and could not be occupied until the snow had either been removed or more evenly dispersed. Upon further inspection it was found that in several sections the roofs had drifts exceeding 6-7 feet with maximum capacity being recommended at no more than 22 inches. With more snow anticipated this week it was felt that immediate action had to be taken to address this concern and school was closed on Friday.

A request was made through the Governor's Office, State Office of Homeland Security, Emergency Management and State Representatives on Thursday for assistance from the National Guard to assist in the clearing effort. On Friday some 100 members of the Air National Guard were deployed to Tolland to work with our staff in clearing roofs. Our staff, working through the evening on Thursday and all day and night Friday, took the necessary steps to coordinate the operation. Shovels were purchased, snow blowers were donated for the day by many residents and the work commenced on Friday morning at 6:30 a.m.

By dark on Friday evening the 100 troops had cleared snow on 3/4 of the roofs at the Middle School and High School. The magnitude of the task was unknown when we first began. After working for twelve hours the Air National Guard made a significant dent in two of the roofs but work still remained at those locations as well as the other two schools. The Superintendent put out a call for volunteers and some 65 residents arrived on Sunday morning to assist with the operation and along with private contractors addressed the remaining roof issues. Without the assistance of the Air National Guard and the dedicated volunteers, our schools would have been closed for at least the remainder of this week and perhaps longer. We are extremely grateful to the Governor's Office for their quick action on our call for assistance. Unfortunately school has to be closed for one more day to allow the snow build up that came from the roofs to be removed from the entrance ways and air vents at the various schools.

This is a winter we will not forget for some time, but I have come to appreciate even more the dedication of Town and School Employees and the ability for all levels of government to come together to assist in times of true emergency. Town employees, like you, have snow on their roofs, leaks, collapses and the desires to take a day off to watch a

football game, yet they are working literally day and night during this time to address the public safety needs of the town and at times sacrificing their own well being and their personal property.

Also, I can not say enough about the residents who donated equipment, brought food and then donated their time to address this pressing community concern. People often say what separates Tolland from other communities is the volunteer spirit that comes forth when asked and often times without asking. Thanks again to all who assisted and I hope those that shoveled can move today.

There are those residents who are quick to tell you how things could have been done better, why didn't we plan for almost thirty days of straight snow, don't we know what it does to the education of our children to cancel school, etc. Yes, I agree that you always learn from your experiences and should this be the pattern for future winters I am sure there are things we could do differently. Like the person who invented roof rakes and who up to this winter was selling a dozen and now is into the thousands, you cannot always predict what is going to occur especially when dealing with Mother Nature. Thanks to all those who continue to support the efforts of your public officials and staff and thanks from us to you for continuing to weather the constant interruptions in your normal routine which this winter is requiring. Again, at any time if you have any questions about town operations, please do not hesitate to email me at swerbner@tolland.org.

Thank you,
Steve Werbner, Town Manager