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Notes from editor (not for publication):

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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 Self-sufficiency can keep costs down

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#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

2 Brattleboro is at a point where services are going to get

3 cut unless we can get creative

#####END SUBHED#####

4 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

5 THE TURN OF THE YEAR seems like as good a time as any
6 to reflect on what we want for our collective future, as well as
7 individual. Some are just waking up to the fact that the two are in
8 fact largely inseparable.

9 As a young adult working on stopping things that seemed
10 like terrible ideas, I discovered that I really needed to give a

11 portion of my attention to the things that I actually wanted for the
12 future.

13 In the context of our current national chaos (speaking of
14 things that desperately need to stop), I find myself leaning
15 heavily on envisioning a future that is more sustainable, resilient,
16 and frankly more fun.

17 I believe that this is the antidote to the dread that some
18 would like to sow into our society.

19 I am encouraged by hearing stories like that of a town in
20 the Midwestern plains which put up a bunch of windmills. They
21 not only make more electricity than they use, but they also
22 provides half of the town's tax revenue and income for the
23 farmers who host them.

24 I have long believed that Brattleboro similarly has the
25 talent and resources to become far more self-sufficient.

26 * * *

27 OBVIOUSLY, WE NEED to look for ideas that are relevant to
28 our circumstances.

29 In terms of energy, we have sun, water, and wood.

30 We have enough suitable roofs for solar to make a huge
31 dent in our electric demand, if not eliminate it. Between
32 downtown and commercial buildings we have acres of roofs,
33 rivaling any solar field we might envision, without using up
34 farmland. Add solar awnings over parking, and we should be
35 able to almost double that production.

36 Some of these could be combined with utility-scale
37 batteries, giving us the option to cover the town even if the grid
38 went down.

39 Despite the good work of Efficiency Vermont and others,
40 there is a lot of room for improvement on the consumption side.
41 For instance, for a half century it has been not only possible but
42 affordable to build housing that doesn't need space heating in
43 this climate.

44 Making these sorts of changes requires an understanding
45 that these things are worthwhile and attainable, but they also
46 require that we have some time and money to spare.

47 We also have parasitic drags on both our attention
48 (especially online) and our finances, from some things we have
49 control over to other things that seem largely out of our control.

50 For instance, our town budget is being stretched to the
51 breaking point by expenses we thought were necessary or
52 politically untouchable. We are at a point where services are
53 going to get cut unless we can get creative.

54 * * *

55 THE THREE EXPENSES that seem to be the most challenging
56 are solid waste, health insurance, and the skyrocketing cost of
57 capital projects.

58 At the moment we are reliant on outside contractors to
59 provide all these services. It might be time to reconsider a long-
60 held assumption that we couldn't address them another way.

61 With solid waste, we are talking about bringing compost
62 in house. That's possible with recycling and trash as well. If we
63 could reduce our volume of waste in several ways, including by
64 being far more diligent about recycling and composting, our
65 savings could be even more significant.

66 Health insurance just got much more expensive for many
67 of us.

68 The possibility of the town of Brattleboro self-insuring
69 has been suggested. The concern is that the town doesn't have
70 enough employees to make a big-enough pool. If it was opened
71 up to residents as well, the pool would be much larger, in the
72 process helping those who are victims of Congress' mercurial
73 approach to health care (and perhaps even giving new life to our
74 struggling hospital).

75 As for town capital projects, there are a host of problems,
76 including which ones we take on, and some of the projects are
77 arguably more important than others.

78 Every step in the process seems designed to make them
79 more expensive. Then they are often financed (with a bond) to
80 reduce the increase in the current year's taxes, while baking in a
81 portion of that expense for years to come.

82 I am not suggesting we never finance a project. I am
83 suggesting that we look at whether the proposed scope of a
84 project includes things that are not worth doing and that when
85 we have only a single bidder we consider postponing projects or
86 at least negotiating the bid.

87 Food self-sufficiency is another area we might want to
88 work toward. There are ongoing efforts in this area, but we will
89 need far more to ensure some level of food security.

90 * * *

91 THESE ARE JUST a few examples of things that could make
92 a huge impact on our economic well-being and our level of
93 resilience.

94 If only the energy being spent on rearranging the deck
95 chairs at Town Meeting was instead focused on how we might
96 make Brattleboro a truly thriving community.

#####END TEXT#####

BIO/COATTAIL:

#####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL#####

97 **FRIC SPRUYT** represents District 9 as a member of
98 Brattleboro's Representative Town Meeting.

#####END BIO/COATTAIL#####

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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