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To: execadmin@nelsonnh.us

Subject:Letter to Selectmen

Russell Thomas

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January 8, 2012

Selectmen Town of Nelson

To the Selectmen,

" First I want to thank you all for your service to our town. I know that you work hard at an increasingly difficult task, and that the tangible rewards are few. I sincerely hope that you find inspiration and satisfaction in this often thankless job somehow, because it is a job that needs doing and few are willing to take it on.

" Second, I write with concern about a few town government issues which may be related or separate. The first is the increasing lack of transparency in town government. By my own knowledge, and hearing from several other townsfolk, a great percentage of each Selectman's meeting is conducted in secret. Perhaps you call it executive session. As I understand it there are, under RSA 91-A:3, several reasons that Selectmen may choose to go into a non-public session, and I have serious doubts that all of your executive sessions fall into those categories. But we, the citizens you represent, will never know, because you refuse to discuss these matters. I earnestly request that each time you consider going into a non-public session, you stop and ask yourselves if this discussion must really be done out of the public view. A few years ago, you were ordinary (well, except for your super powers) citizens like me, and I'm sure you felt that

local government should be open and above board just as I do now. In another few years, you will be resuming your roles as citizens and I hope that you will not look back on the precedents you helped to set during your tenure in office with regret. This sort of secrecy is egregious enough at the federal level, and we seem powerless to affect change there, but within small town government it is noxious, unhealthy, unnecessary, breeds distrust and misunderstanding, and must come to an end.

" I do not believe that every part of our police department's activities are sensitive and must be kept from us. But they are. We do not know what our police force does, but we are assured that they are taking care of very sensitive issues which must not be bruited about. Police forces everywhere are working more for those in power and less as protectors of the public. There is a new " us versus them" mentality on both sides. Let us try to keep control of this one little area where we should have some say. We need to see a full report of police activities in the Town Report. We need to read about crimes and arrests and patrols, and we need to see the hours worked and the vehicles owned, and the miles driven, and where those miles were put on. We are in the dark about most of what our police force does. Why?

" Last summer, suddenly, without explanation, a padlock was placed on the entrance to the underside of our Town Hall. This fall, another padlock, also suddenly and without explanation, was placed on the door to the second floor of the Old School Building, where the town records are kept. I understand that this area does not conform to all the modern rules governing public spaces, and I understand that "The State" says that we shouldn't use this space and I understand that sometimes people bring suit for injury, but I really feel that you are falling prey to the pervasive fear which has been spread through the land for over 10 years now. But I do not know because you will not explain these actions. Several of my neighbors have asked you for an explanation and have been stonewalled or told that any explanation must be given behind closed doors. More secrecy. Perhaps my guesses at the possible rationale for these actions are way off base, but why won't you straighten me out? Why can't the public know what is going on? You

are sowing distrust. We do not have to be afraid because the state tells us we should. We do not have to knuckle under to every whim of our increasingly idiotic legislature. We must not keep fear of legal actions from allowing us all to go about our lawful business. Fear is paralyzing and a powerful weapon of control. Nelson has fought stupidity before and won. I'd like to see us stand up for life and common sense and a sense of adventure. Silly rules or fear of (what are you afraid of?) should not prevent the citizens of Nelson from enjoyment of town property. We live here, not the State, not the rule makers.

" Thirdly, as I began this letter, I understand that you are basically regular citizens who have volunteered, often at some sacrifice, to serve the rest of us as our governing board. I like this form of government and hope it can remain a viable form for many more years. However, I believe that you now need some help. It seems to me that all the mandates and regulations from higher authorities have made the Selectman's job unmanageable for the ordinary volunteer citizen. I am hoping you might be open to investigating the hiring of some sort of part-time town manager or administrator who is schooled in the ways of local government and the bureaucracy involved. I believe that sometimes one specialist can serve several towns effectively while they share the cost between them, making such an arrangement affordable. Such a person might help us avoid some of the minefields and confusions of state and federal law. The point would be to make the job of Selectman doable and maybe even enjoyable, while helping the whole town office run more smoothly, and in the best case, would make our government so efficient that we might even save money.

" This is not a personal attack, but a plea for openness and collegiality. Treat us as fellow citizens who also have the best interests of Nelson in our hearts. Having said that, if our letters and personal requests do not quickly result in some clearing of the air, and some changes for the better, this will become a letter to the editor, and will be only the beginning of a movement for open government in Nelson.

Russ Thomas