

News Brief

Bridgewater

Finances:

The cost of everything has skyrocketed beyond our original estimates. The road damage from excessive July rains did not help and was costly. FEMA funds are unlikely as communities to the south and west were hit far worse than us. School and County taxes will have a greater impact, but we are confident that any tax impact can be managed.

Highway: The new truck that was ordered has yet to arrive. It replaces a 5 year old vehicle that “eats dollars” The design of the emission system for that vehicle was not suited for small town use. Constant highway use would probably reduce the problems. That design has been eliminated by the manufacturer!

Ambulance: We are still waiting for the chassis to arrive to install the body. The first chassis did not meet our specification for weight and we rejected that frame. The funds raised are in escrow awaiting the appearance on the new truck. “Patience is a virtue” these days.

Police: As you probably have noticed, we have more police presence and patrols around town. Excess speed has been addressed and seems to be working. Tragically, one of our residents was fatally injured this summer while walking along Mayhew Turnpike. The exact cause of the incident is still under investigation.

Refuse District: Very busy summer! The District received a \$36,000 federal grant to replace a 40 year old specialized compactor. The replacement will arrive by the end of October. The large 3 year old compactor will be paid off this December. That device has allowed us to substantially reduce the transportation costs for non-recycled goods. The steel pile area has been prepared for cement pads for the new open top dumpsters. We have not received the revenue expected in our steel recycling this year due to dirt contamination as we lifted the materials from the ground for transport. The cement pads have to wait until the next year’s budget cycle.

Budgets: While inflation has impacted our expenses, we were able to pave a number of roads across the town and purchase a replacement vehicle. Those items were approved and funded at Town Meeting from the surpluses from prior years. No new taxes were necessary for those items. We are reaching a point of no long term debt later this year. Given the tenuous nature of the economy, we are in excellent financial shape.

Diesel fuel & oil Costs. This item will be in short supply this winter and will impact us and home owners (fuel oil) in the Northeast. Still a problem associated with global supply and refinery capacity. Heating cost likely will be up for the winter.

School District Withdrawal Update. HB 349 which allows Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton (BHG) to withdraw from the existing District and establish a Special Purpose School District, was signed into law on August 4, 2023 by Governor Sununu.

Per the legislation (HB 349), an initial Steering Committee has been formed consisting of one selectman from each town and the school budget committee member from each town. This initial group was selected because the first issues we need to address are largely financial. The committee will expand as opinions and expertise are needed. We need input, however first we want to quantify expenses and resources.

As expected, rumors abound about this matter. Much of this information is incorrect; we will be posting accurate and current information on our website and all of the committee meetings are public (also posted on the website).

Planning is a process, and we are doing it carefully and thoughtfully, balancing the needs of both our children and residents. There is a temptation to provide quick answers but doing so would be a disservice to our constituents, especially when the issue is as important as our children's education.

We choose to leave the District because it will enhance the overall education results of the students and provide better choices for their family. This is in context of proposals in the School Funding Formula Committee sessions that would have effectively doubled our tax rate without adding a single dollar to the school budget. We simply asked ourselves, "if we are going to pay more shouldn't it be directed towards the kids instead of subsidizing other towns". This is an alternative path to providing superior education on a cost-effective basis.

Bridgewater has always taken a lead position in education for our and the district's children and often at our own expense. Bridgewater and Hebron took on the task of building a new school for the District and leased it to the School District for a \$1 per year. Every initiative proposed by the District, has been supported by Bridgewater. For example, some years ago, the petitioned warrant article for adopting full day kindergarten was written by one of our selectman and given to a parent in New Hampton for insertion into the school district budget. Most of the petitioned signatures were from Bridgewater and Hebron! (To mention a few) There are now two kindergarten and two pre-school classes in B-HVS currently.

Change is not easy, but it is sometimes necessary. This is one of those times. Making changes will not result in tax saving, in fact it may slightly increase our taxes to make sure we are doing the right thing for the academic future of our kids. This is the right thing to do.

Every taxpayer and parent deserves a roadmap of what we are trying to accomplish and to do that we are providing an outline of our goals in a series of pledges to our stakeholders:

Our pledge to Parents: Bridgewater is committed to offering school choice in the newly formed Bridgewater, Hebron, Groton Special Purpose School District. To that end, upon withdrawal from the Newfound Area School District in July 2025, it is the intent of the Bridgewater, Hebron Groton Special Purpose School District to allow **all students** enrolled in middle and high school in the Newfound Area School District to continue to attend those schools, should their families elect to do such.

The Bridgewater, Hebron, Groton Steering Committee is confident that the Newfound School District will not take steps that would be detrimental to a student who is enrolled in their Middle or High School at the time of the formation of the new Special Purpose School District. HB349 calls for the new district to work closely with the Newfound Area School District to offer both school choice and to accommodate students enrolled in the Newfound School District. We fully intend to enter into an agreement with Newfound School District to enable students who are enrolled at the time the new Special Purpose School District is created, to continue at their middle or high school if they so choose. In fact, this is part of affording public school choice. Newfound School District also has a duty to act in good faith toward these students, and we see no reason to believe that they will not meet this duty.

We are prepared to enter into a similar agreement regarding those students attending Bridgewater-Hebron Village School at the time of the new Special Purpose School District formation. We are also confident that a “tailing out” agreement is in the best interests of both Newfound School District and the Special Purpose District, as absent an agreement the tuition that could be charged by Newfound School District for our students would be statutorily capped at the previous year’s average per pupil cost.

Pledge to Teachers and Staff: Teachers and Staff will have the exact same benefits they are currently receiving. In accord with HB 349 and New Hampshire case law (Appeal of SAU #16 Cooperative School Board, 143 NH 97(1998)), the Special Purpose School District is bound by the terms of the existing Collective Bargaining Agreement for those employed at the Village District School as of July 1, 2025. (If a 5 year bargaining is signed by the Newfound School District with our teachers, that contract will be honored in full. No questions.

Pledge for Education Excellence: (No need to get into detail here!) Copy and paste this URL into your browser: <https://bridgewater-nh.com/> On the main banner, choose “Schools” Choose, “Steering Committee” Scroll down to SAU4 Report Cards. Kudos to the teachers and staff!! Lots of reading in that site!!

Pledge to Students from other Towns: The Special Purpose School District also intends to continue to offer the opportunity for Newfound Area School District students who are enrolled in the Village District School as of July 2025 to continue to attend that school through the completion of elementary school. The Special Purpose School District is also willing to discuss the continued maintenance of the Newfound School District preschool at its facility. These are decisions for SAU 4 and out of our control – we have made the offer.

Each town currently pays Newfound School District for payroll services, state reporting requirements and many other services.

Some on the School Board feel that discussing service agreements with us is “...aiding us in leaving the District...” If they elect not to engage with us they may have to reduce staff or raise taxes to offset the loss of our students. There is substantial opportunity to improve the overall community education and for both sides to agree. We have the unique opportunity to simply run two middle school models, offering increased choice without changing much more. At this point the onus is on SAU 4.

Has the Bridgewater Board of Selectman ever proposed or supported anything that has been “Tax and Spend?” We have announced in other newsletter – “This one matter will define the future of taxation in our Towns.” Nothing will be done at the expense of the children nor the professional staff. Any tax increase will be far less than the implications addressed in this message.

We hope you will vote to form our own school district when we vote in March of 2024. It’s better that our three towns determine our financial future rather than allow the remaining school district towns to determine our future for us. We ask for your trust and support in this matter. We will have meetings throughout the three communities. Visit the web site often.

Please keep informed by keeping up with the school section of the website and the Board of Selectmen newsletters. Stay united. As with any change, misunderstandings and rumors abound.

Sincerely,

Terence Murphy
Selectmen

Maurice Jenness

P. Wesley Morrill, Jr