

Town of Bridgewater Selectman's Newsletter Volume 2 2021

Without a doubt, 2020 was an extremely challenging year. COVID-19, revaluation, increased costs, continued downshifting of State workloads to municipalities and a legislature bent on over-dependency on the property tax. Our fate will depend greatly on other local, county and state agencies (65% of your taxes goes out of town).

Even with these challenges, we are in excellent financial shape. As reflected in our proposed municipal budget, there is a small decrease and we ended last year with a modest surplus. We continue to be financially prudent. There are currently three active bills in the legislature that could bring back “donor” towns; HB 608, HB 504 and SB 158 - a system of education funding that sees property rich communities send tax dollars to those struggling to pay for schools. If any of these bills pass in their current form, the impact to Bridgewater would result in a tax rate increase of \$2.00 to \$7.00 over the existing \$8.56 rate. Translated into dollars, would mean a minimum of \$800,000 to be distributed to other “receiver” towns EVERY SINGLE YEAR. This increase would be across the board, not on just one class of property. In addition, the impact on property values is unknown and if there was any significant decline, it would exacerbate the matter.

“Can we offset those increases in the municipal budget?” NO... In order to lower the municipal rate by \$1.00, it would require finding \$449,000 of savings..... an excess not in our budgets.

Since these active legislative bills are of recent vintage, we have joined the “Coalition Communities 2.0”; a group of towns and cities that plan to hire a lobbyist to advocate for its interests in Concord. (On 3/3/21 Selectman Murphy was appointed as a member to the managing board of the coalition.) The group’s main focus will be to dissuade lawmakers from using the statewide property tax to fill shortfalls in education. An annoying facet of this problem is the assumption that property values equals income or ability to pay. It does not. Our median age is 60 years young!

In addition, criticizing education adequacy labels one “anti-education”, which we are not! New Hampshire is one of the leaders in education output and ranks in the top 10 in the nation. The State needs to find alternative funding to support towns not able to support adequacy. The property tax “bucket” is overworked. Try to find towns like Bridgewater

and Hebron who built a school for a school district and supporting costs outside the school budget. It is worth noting, we are a minority of the 150 students in the school who come from the neighboring towns. It is an observation, not a negative. It has been an excellent investment for our communities.

To compound matters, in spite of declining school population in SAU4, the Newfound School District budget is up and there are two articles regarding the existing tax cap.

#1- Raises the existing tax cap from 2% to 3%.

#2- Eliminating the tax cap entirely.

About 300 out of 5000 attended the deliberative session and raised the school appropriation by \$ 991,000. We cannot support these articles and recommend their defeat. Gives new meaning to “the sky is the limit”!

Take away: Our infrastructure and current tax burden is in good shape. We need to take time to see what transpires relative to education funding.

Town improvements includes; The purchase of a new pickup truck for the Highway Department, re-roofed the Public Safety building, replaced of all lighting and ballasts with LED lamps (500 +) in the Public Safety building and (1k) at the school. The energy savings has been significant. We also needed to replace the water treatment system for the Town Hall and Public Safety buildings. We updated and reorganized the accounting information system, upgraded the network firewalls and routers.

All of this is managed by a very “hands on” Select-Board, which results in a significant savings of your tax dollars. We continue to cross train and maintain documentation for the future.

We recently received requests to improve the town website. Creating a website is relatively easy once the “house” is built, however, the hard part is keeping it maintained. We’ve appointed Amy Cunningham to the Board of Selectmen to fill the position of Hank Woolner who passed away last November. One of her many strengths, includes her capability in that area. As a member of the Board, Amy will take the town’s activities, document and update them to the site. Late last year, we started to re-host the site and utilize new tools. Unfortunately, other issues deflected our attention from this matter.

We hire external CPA auditors for three separate entities: The Town, Village District and Refuse District. Julie Converse, town administrative assistant, has been invaluable in all financial administrative matters. We secured a solid waste management permit, landfill closure plan, ground water manager permit and an air resource permit to resolve the requirements of the State relative to the solid waste district. We did most of the

engineering and reporting requirements “in house”. This saved us over \$750,000. We are thrilled to report that the school we build, at your request- for less than \$4 million dollars, is currently a high performing school. ALL thanks to the teachers! As recommended, we started an ambulance service.

We have very low and short term debt which, although a challenge, keeps us busy!

If you're interested in the two year budget comparison, click [here](#). Proposed 2021 budget click [here](#). (To view the entire 2020 Town Report, click [here](#))

In closing, we wish to extend our sincere appreciation to all Town employees, both full and part-time, for their dedication and hard work in making Bridgewater a great place to live. We also want to recognize your trust in us over the years as Selectmen. Much valued. Thanks.

If your friends or neighbors wish to receive periodic updates to our newsletter, just email a request to townofbridgewaternews@gmail.com. Once a year, we used to personally deliver the town report, but the US Postal Service objected unless we mailed them through them!

COME TO VOTE AT THE TOWN MEETING. March 9th 12 noon to 6pm at the Town Hall on Mayhew Tpke. (Voting on town officers and School District Budget)

Terence Murphy

Maurice Jenness Jr.

Amy Cunningham

Select-Board – Town of Bridgewater

Budget deliberation and adoption at 7:30 pm.

Covid-19 protocols will be followed.