

Selectmen's Newsletter - Winter 2022

The town continues to be in good financial shape especially given the COVID19 impacts. We are pleased to report a 2021 tax rate with a modest decline in the overall rate. The 2020 fiscal year ended with a small surplus and we anticipate a similar surplus this year. This will give us the prospect of road paving projects in 2022.

There is a distinct possibility that there will be a challenge to modify or study the apportionment formula for school costs within our school district. Please read the following to understand the issues.

Once Upon a Time: two cars arrive at a store to buy a loaf of bread. Using the values of the respective autos coupled with the number of children in each vehicle, the purchase price of the bread varies depending on the assets and child count. Age, income and other factors are not considered. Currently, in our school district, the total cost of education less revenues is divided by the total enrollment. This results in a cost per student. (About \$18k per pupil) Each member town's educational cost is determined by the number of enrolled students multiplied by the cost per student. Transportation costs are adjusted relative to distance from each school. Every seat in the classroom "pays" the exact same price for the delivered product. (There are lots of different methodologies to assign community educational apportionment for cooperative districts throughout the state. Some include a percent of the equalized valuation of each town)

Last newsletter, ([2021 prior newsletter](#)) we reported that "...There were currently three bills in the legislature that could bring back "donor" towns. HB 608, HB 504 and SB 158 all dealing with school funding. If any of those pass in current form, it could impact Bridgewater and Hebron with a significant tax rate increase...." Being proactive, the town is actively involved with a group of coalition communities that could be similarly impacted. The group is following the state legislature as to the State Wide Education Property Tax and a potential return to "donor towns" to fund the state's educational responsibility. Thus far, the legislature has evaded any major discussion of adequacy funding. In most communities, school costs comprise the majority of the budget. It is "the tail that wags the dog" in budgeting matters. We are no exception. To compound the matter....

Municipalities that have not controlled growth thru zoning and other methods generally have higher operating cost. More, police, fire, school costs etc. Your house valuation does not produce income. Attempting to rationalize the use of property values as a method for a distribution formula is folly. **There is a substantial disconnect between a house value and the owners income for apportionment purposes.** One glaring example of this is Grafton County which administers the County Jail, Superior Court, Nursing Home, Registrar of deed and other

programs and facilities. It apportions a \$ 44 Million budget based solely on property values. Population, usage or income factors have no bearing in the apportionment.

In summary, Local and state educational funding are not only complex, the potential of its financial impact has to be considered in our budgeting. Bridgewater and Hebron are considered to be “rich” communities because of its perceived low tax rates and total property values. Because of property values in our respective towns, we are not eligible for state aid. We are not in conflict with that issue.

Demographics: The median age of Bridgewater and Hebron in the school district is between 60 and 65 years old. All the other towns in the district are between 41 and 48 years young. Median household incomes range 61k to 69k. (US Census – 2019) The coalition communities mentioned in our earlier newsletter, recognize the unique advantages/disadvantages every community has relative to educational funding. There is a real problem with educational funding among other property tax issues. Using assessed values of homes to determine ability to equalize educational funding is, in our opinion, obsolete. Bragging “the NH advantage” is political nonsense. Perhaps using property values by indexing other factors in the calculation might be possible. Unfortunately, that is beyond the scope of this newsletter.

To bridge this local “disparity” problem, Bridgewater and Hebron stepped outside the funding formula and enrollment problems. In 1999, we creating a special purpose village district (BHVD). We (Bridgewater and Hebron) funded (along with grants, private donations etc.) and built a school building to be paid for and owned by the Village District and leased by the School District for one dollar a year. We also supported all the building and maintenance expenses for that building. (This is the precinct tax on your tax bill). Bridgewater and Hebron have disbursed about \$ 8,000,000 since 1999 in that worthy endeavor. We rarely discuss this matter. It is discouraging when others view a town’s tax rate as an indicator of ability to pay. We shared our good luck and planning in helping all the children in the school district. It has had a positive and dramatic educational impact on the entire school district. (Please note - both town’s student enrollments are a minority in the BHVD School.)

Moving on....

Broadband Initiative. Contrary to some rumors, we are not in opposition to any technological proposals that have been discussed in other communities. From the little we know, the federal funding ideas put forth thus far sound similar to the REA funding. The Rural Electrification Act of 1936, enacted on May 20, 1936, provided federal loans for the installation of electrical distribution systems to serve isolated rural areas of the United States. The funding was channeled through cooperative electric power companies, hundreds of which still exist today.

Bridgewater is already 98% cabled. To our knowledge, during the height of the pandemic, no students were disadvantaged. Remote access was achievable. We are not contending that the

current ISP provider is perfect. The aforementioned project will have pros and cons. When more information is available, we will inform you, the community stakeholders.

As we understand the future funding for this project is targeted for communities where the population is spread out making it too expensive for private providers to consider installation.

Beyond "...if you build it, they will come..." Some initial considerations:

- Reputation of the company. Consider the number of years the service provider has been in the industry. ...
- Financial Resources...
- Regional Coverage. ...
- Contract Length. ...
- Good Customer Service. ...
- Costs/Pricing Structure. ...
- Network Coverage. ...
- Technology & IT Resources. ...

We are very open to different approaches to internet services. One matter is certain – it will not be free!! Internet services are not regulated as a public utility. They are private entities. In a recent local news article, federal funding for this proposed project is in doubt. We will update you as this progresses.

Ambulance Replacement. We have received two grants (one federal and one private) to replace our 2002 ambulance. The new vehicle costs \$327,000 which duplicates the existing vehicle specifications. The current ambulance cost \$184,000 in 2002 also funded by a private grant. Like its predecessor, the new ambulance is a four wheel drive vehicle. The existing ambulance will be converted into a special purpose rescue truck carrying specialty extraction tools and the like. Despite its age, it has less than 50K miles on the truck and has been well maintained. The new ambulance purchase will be on the town warrant for your review and approval at the 2022 Town Meeting in March.

Zoning Amendment Proposed: The Bridgewater Planning Board will hold a public hearing in the Bridgewater Town Hall on December 21, 2021 at 7:00 PM and at the Town Clerk's Office on January 18, 2022 at 7PM to discuss and take public comment on the following proposed Zoning Amendment as required in RSA 675:3 and RSA 675:7

Article III: (A) of the Town of Bridgewater Zoning Ordinance divides the Town of Bridgewater into 4 districts: General Residential, Rural Residential, Commercial, and Commercial/Industrial.

The proposed zoning amendment will divide the General Residential District into two districts and rename the Rural Residential as:

1. The Lake District (Currently named the General Residential District)
2. The River Road District (Currently named the General Residential District)
3. The Mountain District (Currently the Rural Residential District.)

Proposed Changes #1 and #2: This proposed amendment recognizes the two distinct areas of town presently identified as the General Residential District. The new Lake District is the portion of the current General Residential District on the west side of town largely along Route 3A. The new River Road District is the portion of the current General Residential District on the east side of town largely along the Pemigewasset River. No changes to permitted uses from current regulations are impacted by this proposal. The remaining District names (Commercial, Commercial/Industrial) would remain unchanged including their District Boundaries and permitted uses.

Proposed Change #3--This proposed change is name only. No changes in District Boundaries nor permitted uses from current regulations are impacted by this proposal. The remaining District names (Commercial, Commercial/Industrial) would remain unchanged including their District Boundaries and permitted uses.

The purpose of this proposed change would allow any future zoning amendment to effect only the Partitioned District. It avoids “one size (i.e. rule) fits all”

All interested persons are invited to attend. This will also be a ballot vote in the Spring Town Meeting.

How Bridgewater has Managed Growth and Environmental issues Over the Years.

- Passed local land use controls. Over the years, the stakeholders have adopted many updates and modifications in keeping with the Master Plan 1985 and future updates
- Conversion ordinance - Seasonal to year round use requires a septic review and update. In addition, if you enlarge the dwelling, the septic has to meet the current DES standard. Our assessing data lists the type of use and age of the systems and use of the property.

- Steep slope management. Slopes greater than 15% have to be deducted from any subdivision proposal. Wet areas and road frontage also are removed. 99% of those areas require a 5 acre minimum lot size
- 2 and 5 acre subdivision requirement depending on the zone. Most of Bridgewater is in the 5 acre zone.
- Pemi River shoreline protection. Protecting this area is as important as the Lake.
- Restriction on waterfront rights of way. (Funneling) on Pemi and Newfound.
- Wetland evaluation study – entire Town. Maps wet areas in town. Natural resources inventory.
- Building permit system. Septic review is required if you're expanding septic loading. In areas bordering the Lake, most old systems have been moved/upgraded away from the lake by the use of pumping systems. Cottage colonies that were converted to condos had major engineering requirements for water and septic upgrades before approval.
- Redevelopment of property or change in use – includes septic/water review. Septic loading on small lots, setback improvements etc.
- Lot Merger. In densely populated areas, we encourage lot mergers. Usually lowers tax bill to owner.
- Master Plan focuses on slow growth, environmental and natural resource protection.
- Other
 - Highway culvert and water diversion management
 - Consulting forester to encourage best management practices in logging
 - Solid waste management program – HB Refuse District. Recycling, reuse, incineration and landfill programs.

Coupled with local and state regulations, we have been able to manage these issues improving property owners' equity in their property. Property values increase over time.

Some reminders. *Building permits are required.* Some work requires a DES asbestos remediation plan. Some work requires a Shoreline Protection permit on the Pemi River and the Lake areas. Large clearing may require an alteration of terrain permit. With very few exceptions, all win.

On a couple of issues, owners who took the approach "...better to ask for forgiveness, than for permission..." paid dearly (\$) for the transgression. We are here to help meet these issues to avoid missteps. Give us a call.

During February of 2022, we will update you on the funding issue and department happenings. Please encourage your neighbors and friends to submit their email address to be added to our mailing list.

Sincerely,

Maurice Jenness

P. Wesley Morrill

Terence Murphy

Selectmen

Bridgewater, NH