

Bridgewater News Brief - Fall 2024

The new **Pasquaney School District (SAU108)** is well on its way since the spring town meeting approved the withdrawal from SAU4. We have an initial agreement with the Newfound Area School District (SAU4) which will allow for an orderly transition over a period of years. The district has also completed the necessary paperwork establishing Pasquaney with the NH Department of Education. We have obtained the consulting services of an experienced business administrator and superintendent to guide us in the transition. Discussions with the existing teachers and staff are ongoing. The Pasquaney School Board is currently adopting a number of policies which are common in NH school districts. Discussions regarding tuition agreements, etc. are ongoing with both Plymouth Regional High School (SAU48) and SAU4.

Currently, we are developing a comprehensive school budget within a new software system. It will include a payroll system as well. The domain name “placeholders” have been attained and development of the student management systems is underway. In addition, transition meetings have been held to evaluate how to convert the current digital work space used by the teachers to Pasquaney School District. Integrating systems to the NH Department of Education and Revenue Administration has just started.

Needless to say, this is an impressive task. Not only because it’s that complex, but it consists of systems that have evolved over the last 50 years for public school education. It’s a bit of a lift, but well underway.

One aspect of the conversion is: **“What happens to the children from other towns that are currently attending B-HVS?”** The SAU108 School Board and our Steering Committee have been very open about the following policy. We will not “push” out any currently enrolled student in B-HVS. SAU108 has also repeatedly offered to keep the SAU4 preschool program at B-HVS. We are working to study the space needs as we migrate over time to add grades 6-8. We are trying to accommodate the existing SAU4 preschool. Any questions regarding out-of-district enrollment from towns other than Bridgewater, Hebron, or Groton should be directed to SAU4.

For more information on the Pasquaney School District:

<https://townofbridgewaternh.godaddysites.com/b-h-g-steering-committee>

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Bridgewater-Hebron Village District: Bridgewater and Hebron formed a Special Purpose Village District in 1998 and built a school building which is leased to SAU4 for a dollar a year. That lease, which expired in 2024, was extended for one year. It will transfer to Pasquaney School District July 1, 2025. B-HVD pays all of the major maintenance and capital costs for the facility. SAU4 currently supplies all of the teachers, staff etc. Essentially, the same terms of the lease will be similar between Pasquaney and B-HVD.

Late summer, the main playground was replaced and an additional smaller playground was installed in the rear of the building. The small playground is designed for very young and special-needs children in the preschool. The larger playground was about 25 years old, was developing some cracks, and was not ADA compliant. The total cost for that project was about \$240,000 of which close to \$200,000 were donated funds. We are still seeking additional private funds. For reference, the Bridgewater-Hebron Education Association, a 501C3 charitable division of B-HVD, accepts tax-deductible donations to promote educational opportunities on behalf of Bridgewater-Hebron Village School. Donations may be mailed to B-HVS, 297 Mayhew Tpke, Bridgewater, NH 03222 and can be made out to the Bridgewater-Hebron Education Association.

Grant: Recently, we received notification of a substantial grant award to allow for the addition of two classrooms to the village school building. It will require a short-term bond to have adequate funding in addition to those grant funds. There will be no increases in the village district tax rate for the project. Good news for the children and taxpayers. More information will be forthcoming.

Town of Bridgewater Taxes: Given the recent town-wide property revaluations this summer, we still predict that the resulting tax rate will decline from \$8.30 to about \$6.00/1000 of valuation. The next tax issue facing us, and other communities, is a current lawsuit at the NH Supreme Court. This is in regard to the Statewide Education Property Tax (SWEPT). Our town selectmen have been actively involved in this issue since 2000. For about four years, we were a “donor” town until the current system was modified about 2005. Our group, The Coalition of Communities 2.0, is working with the State in opposition to that lawsuit. Depending on the outcome of that suit, we could return to being a “donor” town. The Coalition has a constitutional attorney representing all of the Coalition communities that could be impacted by that lawsuit. For more information, the City of Lebanon has a well-thought-out

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summary. See: [SWEPT Lawsuit NH](#). Unfortunately, the issue is complex. We will keep you informed as this matter moves forward.

Public Safety. After a two-year COVID delay, our new ambulance has arrived. The old 2001 ambulance will be repurposed as a rescue vehicle and carry the necessary equipment for that purpose (Jaws of Life, etc.). The initial cost of the vehicle was \$327,789.00. Because of the delays, the final price was about \$340,000! Grants and donations absorbed about 95% of the total costs.

The **Police Division**, over the last 18 months, has increased its presence by expanding patrols and randomizing schedules. They also assist in EMS calls when on duty. Chief Huckins is EMS certified, and Officer Johnson is CPR certified.

The **Fire Department** continues to learn about the dangers of lithium batteries and electric vehicle fires. The new technology, while widely available, has a downside. If they burn, they are toxic and tough to extinguish. Be cautious with those types of batteries. (See HB section for more on batteries) If you're interested in joining the department, it is a paid, part-time volunteer position. We could use the help!! Please give it some thought.

Highway: 2024 has had less precipitation than 2023. Dirt roads were easier to maintain this year. Scheduling grading is somewhat dependent on the moisture content of the soil. With low moisture content, the disturbed soil will not compact and the surface will degrade. When we grade, we also use a roller to improve compaction. This technique has proven very effective. We recently purchased a large debris vacuum. Its purpose is to remove leaves and sticks from the ditch lines around culverts. It lowers the risk of plugging the culvert inlet and, eventually, overtopping the culvert and washing out the road.

HB Refuse: The following is the NH DES statement of reduction and diversion policy regarding solid waste: *"The Solid Waste Management Act establishes a waste reduction goal (RSA 149-M:2) and a hierarchy of preferred waste management methods (RSA 149-M:3) in order to encourage and support an integrated system of waste management that reduces the generation of waste where possible, while also managing the waste that is generated in the most environmentally-responsible manner available. While the Solid Waste Management Act does not establish waste reduction or recycling as mandatory practices in New Hampshire, the statute does encourage management of wastes..."*

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The complexities of solid waste management continue to grow. For example, plastic bags, while convenient, are not recyclable. With your support, we recycle aluminum, metals, C&D materials (as a refuse-derived product), paper, cardboard, and 40% of the plastics. Unfortunately, more comes in the facility that ends up in a pre-crusher that crushes and compacts for transfer to a landfill. We toss away an 800-pound bale of plastic bags every week (less in the winter) to a landfill! If the plastic bag was a paper bag – no problem. Many like the convenience of the plastic bag! The state policy does nothing to substitute paper for plastics. It is a legislative issue. They kick the can down the road! (Pun intended). More out of state trash is filling our limited NH landfills forcing the disposal costs up while producing more methane and CO₂. It's complicated. **Starting July 1, 2025, rechargeable lithium-ion batteries will be prohibited from disposal in all New Hampshire's landfills and incinerators. Effectively, if it's rechargeable, it's recyclable!** For many years we have prohibited batteries in the burnable disposal area as the battery contents can cause emission issue if burned. Please separate your batteries from your burnable waste. The staff thanks you for your continued efforts in recycling. More on this at the facility.

Finances: As we approach the end of the calendar year, our budgets are tight but in good shape. We have no long-term debt; our infrastructure is in good condition, and department heads are fiscally prudent as the year nears end. The Grafton County apportionment for services (jail, superior court, nursing home, etc.) uses equalized property assessments to determine our share of the budget. This was up considerably (\$679,971 to \$820,607). The SAU4 2024-25 school budget is up and exceeded the 2% tax cap by an \$800,000 vote of the taxpayers. Because of the increase, Bridgewater's monthly cost grew from \$143,567 to \$165,000 per month. (It reflects a very small increase in Bridgewater students). As for most of us, the costs of goods and services are up as well but they appear to be stabilizing. We will likely end this budget cycle with a small surplus. Nonetheless, we are doing OK.

Cybersecurity refers to any technologies, practices, and policies for preventing cyberattacks or mitigating their impact. Cybersecurity aims to protect computer systems, applications, devices, data, financial assets, and people against ransomware and other malware, phishing scams, data theft, and other cyberthreats. The Newfound Area School District experienced such an attack in November 2023. Effectively, they are still in recovery and having difficulties recovering their data sets.

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While we have had a fairly robust security system, we upgraded those systems this year to mitigate such an impact. **Nothing is 100% safe in the digital world.** For example, if you misspell your online banking name during a search, it is possible you could end up at a bogus site which appears exactly like your bank webpage. If you attempt a login then your username and password are compromised. (Among other scams).

Thank You: The State and Federal elections are, thankfully, over. An 85% turnout of those eligible voters cast their ballots in the recent elections for State and Federal offices. A very impressive number! The Moderator, Town Clerk and other officials were well prepared for the election and minimized waiting and disruptions. To the volunteers and others who helped tabulate the final results, a sincere “Thank You”

Sincerely,

Terry Murphy, Skip Jenness, Wes Morrill
Bridgewater Selectboard