

## **2017 REPORT OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

***John A. Sherman, Chair***

I am pleased to submit to the residents of Plaistow the Board of Selectmen's annual report for 2017. I'd first like to thank all our citizens who work together to help make Plaistow the great Town that it is. Let's celebrate last year's accomplishments, learn more about the projects we have in process and let us show you how we continue "Planning for our Future."

### **2017 Selectmen Accomplishments**

The Board of Selectmen is comprised of five independently elected citizens who set policy and conduct the general management of Plaistow's Town Government. The Board members in 2017 stayed the same as the previous year – Tammy Bergeron, Peter Bracci, Julian Kiszka, Steve Ranlett and John Sherman. Each selectman brings



a varied background with many areas of expertise. At our organizational meeting in March, John Sherman was selected Chair and Tammy Bergeron was selected Vice Chair.

The Board's first, and most important task was selecting a new Town Manager, Mark Pearson. Mark has a wealth of government experience, primarily in NH. Mark was first hired on an interim basis, which the Board soon changed to a permanent status after seeing Mark aggressively tackling the Town's priority issues. Mark replaced Sean Fitzgerald, and we wish Sean the best after eight (8) years of serving the Town of Plaistow.

We chose this transition as a good time to update the Town Manager's Job Description. There weren't any big changes, just clarification of some sections and ensuring it was consistent with State Law (RSAs).

The Town Manager immediately jumped in and resolved some problems with the new Public Safety Complex Project. This was a well-planned project, but any project this size will have issues and will need constant monitoring. Mark has done a great job here!

One of the new Town Manager's first surprise priorities was making overdue upgrades to our computer network. This was accomplished seamlessly with no unplanned computer downtime.

We plowed through the backlog of old Selectmen non-public minutes that had been sealed immediately after creation, but never had a systematic review to determine when they could be made public. Many non-public minutes are time-sensitive and should be sealed initially, but can be converted to non-sealed after the particular issue

has been resolved. For example, a set of minutes may discuss in-process contract negotiation, and thus, it makes sense to initially seal the minutes. But after the negotiation is complete, the minutes can, and should, be made public.

This past year, the Board of Selectmen has aggressively searched for alternate ways of financing some of our projects from sources other than property taxes. We will pay for a much needed AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) by utilizing drug forfeiture funds, not property taxes. We will pay for police cruiser replacement by using the fees collected from Police Details, not property taxes. We will apply for grants to help us fund the Mount Misery Trail System that we hope to develop out behind PARC (Plaistow Area Recreation Complex).

### **Financial Overview**

To strengthen our internal financial controls and management, the Town Manager hired Greg Colby as Finance Director/Assistant Town Manager. Greg has served as a financial consultant to many towns in New Hampshire. He has already done much to improve the Town's Financial Policies and Reporting as you will see elsewhere in this report. We strive to improve our Financial Reporting each year, and this year you will see new Comparative Statement, Fixed Assets Statements and an improved Tax Rate Calculation page.

When reviewing these documents, you will see what a strong financial situation we are in. We have a healthy fund balance and have \$1.7M in various Capital Reserve Funds that we use for keeping a level tax rate as we plan for future capital projects per our CIP (Capital Improvement Program).

With the Town Manager's leadership, the Town executed a land auction to sell off some surplus properties. This effort had been lingering for some time and Mr. Pearson aggressively took the lead in contacting, St Jean's Auctioneers of Epping, NH, an auction house that had done similar auctions for other towns in New Hampshire. The Board of Selectmen did an exhaustive review of all Town-owned properties and, making sure we followed the State RSA's, auctioned the properties. A substantial amount was realized from the sale. The final dollar amount was not confirmed at the time of this report. This sale put these surplus properties back on the tax rolls. Additionally, the proceeds of the sale of town-owned properties will be placed in the Town's General Fund and can be used in the future for off-setting the Town's property tax burden.

We did a lot of housekeeping that may not appear important, but that helps get everyone working on the same page and with the proper financial controls. We updated the purchasing policy, the annual assessing update procedure, the credit card policy, the towns investment policy, and, most importantly, the Personnel Plan which hadn't been updated in more than eight (8) years.

We have Warrant Articles to dissolve six (6) outdated Capital Reserve funds and apply those dollars to the General Fund. These funds served their purpose and are no longer needed.

### **Current and Near-Term Projects**

You'll read in other areas of this Town Report that the **Safety Complex** will be on-line in early 2018. The **Safe Routes to School** Project (focusing on the intersection Main and Elm streets) should be completed in 2018. The **Westville Road** bridge replacement (if approved by the voters) will be constructed during the summer of 2018. (This will cause some short-term traffic issues during construction, but will start AFTER the close of school in the spring 2018 and BEFORE the start of school in the fall 2018.) Again, if supported by the voters, we intend to start construction of the new **Public Works Facility** on the former Penn Box site, next to the railroad tracks as the first part of a two-year project. And due to sound financial management, most of the above projects will NOT require the use of property tax dollars.

Another source for improving future planning is to be more consistent in the scheduling of Regional Selectmen's meetings with Plaistow, Atkinson, Hampstead, Danville and Sandown. Other towns have faced the same issues as us and hearing how they may have resolved the issue (or not) can be very informative.

### **Planning for the Future**

One thing that the citizens of Plaistow can appreciate and have always supported is our Planning for the Future. We have more than \$1.7M in Capital Reserve Funds that will be used to fund our future fire vehicles, highway vehicles, and other future projects.

We have submitted Warrant Articles asking for more future planning, such as for a Winter Maintenance Expendable Trust, so we can set some money aside during lower-snow winters (we hope) and use it to offset the year's where the highway plowing overdraws the funding in our operating budget.

The largest and most important future project will be developing an infrastructure for providing potable water to Plaistow. This is a State of NH led project, so it can be frustrating to the Town that we can't provide a solid schedule or solid financials. We need to stay available so that when a solution is finalized, we will be best-positioned to do what's best for the Town of Plaistow. Our Town Manager is aggressively working with the State, other towns, and the expert consultants that have been supplied by the State. We have been planning for this for many years, including constructing a fire-suppression infrastructure that could be converted to potable water. Other towns may not have been planning as well as Plaistow, so it may take extra patience on our part to see this project through. Stay tuned.

In closing, on behalf of the Board of Selectmen, I would like to thank all the citizens of Plaistow who have entrusted us to do what's best for our great town.