

## **2018 REPORT OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMAN**

*Julian Kiszka, Chair*

I am pleased to submit to the residents of Plaistow our annual report summarizing 2018. As I complete my 4<sup>th</sup> year on the board, currently serving as chairman, I want to extend my gratitude to the citizens of Plaistow. I am impressed with the focus this year on making significant progress on several long-standing projects and issues directly affecting our citizens while being financially responsible.

The Board of Selectmen (BOS) appreciate the support and help of the other town Committees and Boards that are comprised of scores of Plaistow Citizens who love Plaistow and aid in keeping the town well-functioning now and in the future. The work they do to protect the environment, manage our budgets and capital planning, manage land use, conserve energy, and support recreation is often unheralded and often overlooked.

In keeping with the theme ***Moving Forward***, I am pleased to report on the significant achievements in 2018 that have built on planning from previous years as well as new initiatives from new faces in Town Hall that will take us forward for decades to come.

### **2018 Highlights**

Big changes this year are:

- Bringing clean, safe, affordable Potable (drinking) water to Plaistow
- Construction Projects
  - New Plaistow Safety Complex coming online
  - Safe Routes to School (SRTS) nearly complete
  - Construction of the Public Works Facility, phase 1
    - Town Manager Mark Pearson serving as Owners Project Manager (OPM), saving the town money
    - Using existing town owned land for an optimally located site.
  - Westville bridge project delayed in order to get better construction rates.
- Financial
  - New streamlined budgeting process
  - Updating the property assessment process and software
  - Increasing of the elderly tax exemption is on the warrant for 2019
  - Conserving energy in multiple projects, including completing the library LED project
  - Received funds from the auction of Town-owned land. It was a positive experience. This money contributed to funding the new Public Works Facility building without raising taxes.
- A new level of improved transparency in town operations and management.
- New people in key positions

## **2018 REPORT OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMAN** *(continued)*

### **2018 Selectman Highlights**

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 2018 include Julian Kiszka, Peter Bracci, John Sherman, and Steve Ranlett, all having served in previous years, each bringing a varied background with many areas of expertise. We welcomed Francine Hart to the board this year. Her past budget chair, executive leadership, and finance experience along with continuing municipal training, give Plaistow a highly effective selectwoman. Francine continued to work with others to streamline the budgeting process and did due diligence on several important issues for the town.



### **Potable Water Progress**

Plaistow's only source of drinking water is ground water from wells. The Town of Plaistow is the home of one of the largest active EPA Superfund locations (Beede Waste Oil) in New England. This contamination has significantly impaired the Town's watershed. We have also known for nearly 50 years that we need an alternate source of drinking water. The Town has literally been preparing the groundwork for decades by creating a system of underground water pipes to carry the water. It is currently used as the fire suppression system. In 2018 our citizens voted to allow the creation of a town operated Public Water Supply with a 76.7% favorable vote. We may now allow potable water to come into Plaistow using these pipes.

The Town Manager, as well as myself, have attended countless meetings with regional authorities, in order to ensure Plaistow obtains a clean, safe, affordable source of water and the infrastructure to maintain it. Several routes have been considered and we now have a final source and route for the water from



Manchester, NH. If all goes as planned, clean, safe, potable water will be flowing in Plaistow by early 2020. See the Town Manager's report for more details.

I wish to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of both State Senator Chuck Morse and Town Manager Mark Pearson in making this happen. I cannot overstate the importance of this water to Plaistow's future.

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### **Town Employee Highlights**

Town Manager Mark Pearson does the day-to-day work of town management. The board makes policy decisions; Mr. Pearson is the man who makes things happen. Mark also allowed and encouraged his personal review by the BOS to be done in public, further supporting his full and genuine commitment to open and transparent government. We continue to be impressed with his dedication and effectiveness.



Our Finance Director, Greg Colby, is also our Assistant Town Manager. He has been doing an excellent job working hand-in-hand with Mr. Pearson to stay on top of absolutely every aspect of our financials, optimizing our financial efficiency.

Retirements – Town Clerk Maryellen Pelletier, Fire Chief John McArdle, Police Chief Kathleen Jones, and Treasurer Nancy Bolduc. We wish them all a happy retirement and thank them for their long-dedicated years of service to our community.

Filling key positions – Interim Fire Chief John Judson, Emergency Management Director and Interim Police Chief Douglas Mullin, and Planning Director John Cashell.

A special thanks to Beth Hossack and Susan Westin for always being there and keeping things running smoothly, supporting the Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, and Selectmen.

### **Streamlined Budget Process**

With the recommendation of the Town Manager and Finance Director, we streamlined the budget process for 2019, which was undertaken during the 2018 calendar year.

Department heads were tasked with building their budget and presenting it to the Town Manager/Finance Director by September 1. The Town Manager then worked them into one budget that was presented to the Board during a meeting in October. The Board after careful review and consideration, approved that budget with minor changes and it was passed along to the Budget Committee by the end of the month.

This streamlined process was much improved over what had been done previously, and we hope to further improve on it going forward.

### **Tax Rate/Fiscal Standing**

The Town's tax rate was set this fall at \$24.59 per \$1,000 of assessed value as of April 1. More specifically, the Town portion was set at \$6.33 or approximately 26% of the total rate. The remaining amount is for the School and County taxes to run each respective government.

The Town rate was up 42 cents over 2017 or 7.1%. The Board made a conscious effort to reduce the Town's reliance on utilization of surplus funds to level and or reduce the rate.

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Once the tax rate was set, the Town still maintained approximately 7.27% of retained fund balance, which is within the DRA recommended guidelines of 5-17%. We expect with the closing of the books and records at the end of 2018 to improve on this percentage.

### **Financials**

Overall, we feel the Town is in strong financial position. With an active CIP, well-funded capital reserve, debt limited to the Public Safety Complex building project, expendable trust funds for our future, and a modest local tax rate, we feel the Town is well positioned for the future financially. Our budget being presented for 2019 is only anticipating an approximately 3% increase on the local rate.

Spending is well thought-out and controlled with oversight by the Town Manager and Finance Director. The audit report on the town financials for the year ended December 31, 2017 came back with an "unmodified opinion," meaning there is no action needed to make the Town's financial reports more transparent or clear. This is a good indication of the level of expertise we have in the Town office.

### **Closing**

On behalf of the Plaistow Board of Selectmen, please know how proud we all are of this town. This community is extraordinary. Defined by engaged citizens and strong faith-based, civic groups, businesses and nonprofit organizations that care deeply about this town.

The BOS continues to keep a focus on making the important and difficult decisions in the best interest of this community. We are truly proud of all we have accomplished during 2018 as a board and a community, and look forward to continuing to build upon its successes in 2019.

