

2020 REPORT OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Francine Hart, Chair

2020 welcomed the newest member of our Selectboard, Mr. John (Jay) DeRoche. Although the newest and youngest member of the Board, Jay is no stranger to hard work and community service. He immediately hit the ground running, volunteering for several projects including the creation of a Town Facebook page to let our citizens know all the events going on in town. He continues to volunteer with our Scout Pack #18 and was named "Lion of the Year" for his dedication and service to the Plaistow Lions Club.

Jay's expertise in Information Technology (IT) has married beautifully with Greg Taillon, our Vice Chair's knowledge. They collaborated on providing the Town with a critical pathway toward improving cybersecurity. Jay has been a thoughtful, engaging member of our Board, and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with him.

From the outset, our team of Selectmen have embodied the theme of ***in this together***. We have had a number of robust discussions over this past year, and have had to make some very difficult decisions, but each decision was made with you, our citizens, in mind. After all, whether we sit on one side of the dais or the other, we are all mindful that we are ***in this together***.

2020 PROJECTS

At the outset of 2020, the Board was enthusiastically looking forward to completing projects that were on the books. When COVID-19 hit, the Board needed to step back and reevaluate the financial impact of some of our decisions. Because the Town approved several of our Warrant articles, we were able to move forward with most of the projects on our "to do" list. **TOGETHER** with our Town Manager, we were able to design a fiscally responsible Request for Proposal (RFP) to repair and replace the sidewalks in Pollard Park so our citizens could at least get outside and walk safely in the fresh air, even though they had to maintain social distances.

We put our heads **TOGETHER** to arrange for a long-awaited replacement of the Pollard Road culvert by obtaining an Aquatic Resources Mitigation (ARM) to defray the costs to the Town. As you travel down that newly repaired stretch of road you can know that it will not flood in the future and the Seaver Brook riverbed habitat will thrive.

Our Recreation (Rec) Department was perhaps the hardest hit; virtually all of their activities involve close contact of some sort, which was a challenge with social distancing. But that did not deter the creativity of the Rec Commission when they put their collective heads **TOGETHER** to come up with plan to provide a COVID safe summer program for our children. Our Library worked **TOGETHER** with the Rec Department to show Friday Night Movies, a BIG hit with everyone. Summer Concerts, although off to a slow start, were redirected to the fields at Plaistow Area Recreation Complex (PARC), and virtual pumpkin decorating took the place of sidewalk contests. We even managed to improve drainage at PARC so that a new softball field could be constructed. By combining funds

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from grants, impact fees, and Capital Reserves **TOGETHER**, the Town should be able to play ball on a brand new field in 2022.

Thanks to the creativity of our Town Manager Mr. Mark Pearson, the Town was able to repurpose the recently vacated Courthouse and convert it to a Town Hall Annex which now houses our Department of Building Safety and Recreation Department. This relocation of offices has provided spacing for staff and safe access for those who need to use those services.

Who knew when we were constructing the Public Works Garage that it would become our "COVID-safe go-to meeting" venue for elections and so much more? After a rough start during the primaries, our Moderator, Bob Harb, Supervisors of the Checklist, Selectboard, and our Town Manager gathered **TOGETHER** to solve most of the roadblocks we encountered and deliver a much better system when it came time for the Presidential election. It looks like we will also be able to use this building for our Deliberative Session as well. This space has become a multi- purpose building which may continue to reinvent itself for Town use in the future.

The crowning jewel in our Town surely has to be our Potable Water Project. As we near completion of this monumental task, we gratefully thank all the contributors in the project; our Town Manager, Underwood Engineering, and our State agencies who have managed to work **TOGETHER** for the common goal of providing clean, safe drinking water for Plaistow.

As we close the year on projects, we are in process of completing updated LED lighting for Town Hall and putting the finishing touches on the Plaistow Works Garage with a new solar-powered salt shed, all designed to save the Town money in the future.

FISCAL PLANNING

Managing a municipality is always a challenge, but never more so with COVID-19 wreaking havoc with our pocketbooks and livelihoods. Despite the uncertainty of balancing outgoing expenditures with incoming revenues, I am proud to report the Finance Department, headed up by our Finance Director, Mr. Greg Colby, has done an extraordinary job in this area. He has deftly juggled the loss of interest income with the significant increase in the sale of Town property (approximately \$210,000 from properties sold). He has reported slight losses in rooms and meals tax over last year (\$393,000 in 2019 vs. \$392,000 in 2020) and in Block Grants (\$159,000 in 2019 vs. \$155,000 in 2020).

The Town Clerk has recorded approximately a \$50,000 increase in motor vehicle registrations over last year. Perhaps the most significant (and of greatest concern) was the ability of homeowners and businesses to pay their property tax bills. Mr. Colby reported that the collection of property taxes for the July bill was up by approximately TWO percentage points over the last two years! The depth of financial understanding and expertise that Mr. Colby brings to the table, coupled with his calm, prudent outlook with regards to our path forward, has been of tremendous reassurance to our Board. **TOGETHER**, we have been able to make many decisions throughout the year with

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confidence due to his guidance. Not only have we been able to pay our obligations, but we have also been able to reduce our municipal tax rate by **\$.43/\$1000 of assessed value**. Because of his, and our Town Manager's direction, I can confidently state that Plaistow is in solid fiscal shape, despite the economic turmoil going on around us. Our Town should be grateful we have a well run and well managed town because of these two men.

EMPLOYEE HIGHLIGHTS

It is always difficult to say goodbye to our long- standing employees. This year we bid a fond farewell to our Building Inspector, Mr. Mike Dorman, and our Government Buildings Supervisor, Mr. Paul Lucia. However, when one door closes, another opens, and our town welcomes our new Fire Chief, Chris Knudsen, and his family all the way from Tennessee.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge all the amazing employees, officials, and citizens of our town who have come **TOGETHER** in this crisis of undetermined duration. I especially wish to thank Dee Voss, whose magic has put this Town Report together year after year with flawless precision. I have no doubt we will go forward into the future stronger, kinder, and more resilient... but always ***in this together.***

