

## **REPORT OF THE TOWN MANAGER**

***Mark A. Pearson, J.D., Town Manager***

Early in 2020, the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) made its way to New Hampshire. Starting in February, we modified Town Hall and other town functions for health and safety reasons. Town Hall hours of operation were modified until the proper health and safety safeguards could be purchased and installed.

By the fall, a few town employees had contracted the coronavirus while others were exposed and required to quarantine. By December, even more employees contracted the virus and several more had been exposed and quarantined. There were more cases in New Hampshire in December than in the period of March to November combined. During the period of February to December there have been furloughs, layoffs, reduced staffing and reduced hours of operation to work within the changing environment. Services were delivered, with some modification, but for the most part, Town Hall was open for business.

Some revenue was interrupted while there were State and Federal grants made available to help offset the costs of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), supplies, wages, equipment, safety screening for offices and other health and safety recommendations.

Several town staff were assigned equipment to work remotely from home to keep the town operational during part of the year. Travel to meetings and training was reduced or eliminated. Our Information Technology (IT) capabilities were upgraded with new equipment through the Governor's Office For Emergency Relief and Recovery (GOFERR) grant providing funding of \$182,000. Town Hall Meeting Room (Great Hall) was upgraded with new equipment to facilitate remote access to meetings for boards, committees and the public.

The Fire Department staffing was increased to 24 hours – 7 days a week through another grant of approximately \$126,592. This was directly related to the COVID-19 contamination or exposure for first responders while at the same time providing faster response times between 6 pm and 6 am.

Additionally, I recommended to the Board of Selectmen to move the Recreation and Building Safety Departments to the “old courthouse” town-owned building on Elm St – which did happen, and that facility was renamed “Town Hall Annex.” This was also part of the COVID-19 health and safety plan which reduced foot traffic at Town Hall to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors and at the same time became a ground-floor operation for recreation and building permitting.

The Public Works Garage was improved to accommodate the elections, hold Joint Loss Management Committee meetings, large meetings beyond the Great Room capacity with COVID-19 restrictions, and the future Deliberative Session and Point of Distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine through the Southeast Central Public Health Network. The facility was outfitted with new Cable TV equipment to ostensibly duplicate the Town Hall Cable TV Access for the large meetings we currently are facing challenges with

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respect to safe space. This included the addition of an emergency generator for auxiliary power during loss of power.

Our Records Management Project did start before COVID-19 but was interrupted for a period until resuming in the fall. This has enabled the relief of excessive floor load in the Town Hall Clock Tower space which was one of the goals of the project.

Town Hall received improvements to the roof, carpeting, flooring, and HVAC (heating, venting and air conditioning) filtration system – related to COVID-19. Town Hall received LED Replacement Lighting.

We changed vendors for Information Technology (IT) and town-wide phone system. We received an IT Security Assessment and upgraded the town-wide system to a higher level of protection from ransomware, hacking and viruses.

Just a brief update on the projects we completed this year; Town Hall (Pollard Park) Sidewalks, Pollard Road Culvert Replacement, LED Streetlight Replacement, Route 125 Island Enhancement, Highway Department Dump Body Replacement, Public Safety Complex Road Extension, Public Works Salt Shed Construction, Plaistow Area Recreation Complex (PARC) Softball Field, Drainage and Trail Access Gravel Walkway, Drainage Improvements along Carli's Way, Landfill Cap Engineering and Permitting and Public Safety Communications – Phase 3 completed.

We completed the sale of two (2) town-owned properties and brought in approximately \$200,000 in revenue, The Police Department held a public auction of evidence and town property which brought in \$16,586 in revenue. We hired a General Government Building Supervisor and a Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer, and fully staffed the Police Department – both in dispatch and officers.

Several staff members have taken on more duties and responsibilities when positions are eliminated through attrition. Several other staff members have been assigned more duties and responsibilities because of increased workload. There are several staff members that are performing two (2) or three (3) job functions. We have successfully lowered the town portion of the tax rate by approximately 8 percent through different efficiencies or strategies over the last four (4) years while maintaining or increasing services.

One of the largest projects that I have worked on over my four (4) year tenure is the Potable Water Project. This project will bring potable water to the Town of Plaistow in either late 2021 or early 2022 and will be a once in a lifetime accomplishment. I will speak further on this topic in my Water Superintendent's Annual Report.

I look forward to the worldwide pandemic of Coronavirus being mitigated so we all can return to more of a normal life and work environment. We are all ***in this together***.

Please continue to be patient with all town departments, as the majority of you have, so we all can get through a challenging 2021.