

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator

By Stephen Halleran

The Selectboard signed and posted the town warrant on February 18th establishing the official slate of business for discussion at this year's annual meeting. The town report is, again this year available on the town website. Use of the town site continues to grow from month to month. If you're looking for up to date information about town business, www.plainfieldnh.org is the place to start. In the coming weeks we hope to offer an opportunity for residents, who wish, to receive town related information updates and town news via e-mail. Our plan is to keep this informal and very simple, but to have it be just another easy way for people to better understand and access our local government.

A brief run down of the 2009 warrant follows:

Article 1 is the voting for town officers on Tuesday March 10th. There are no contested races for town seats and no proposed zoning changes.

Article 2 will be taken up on Saturday March 14th and is the town operating budget. As is commonly known, the Selectboard working with the Finance Committee required that the net town appropriation result in no increase of municipal taxes. Consequently, while some department lines have gone up, many have gone down. The bottom line request is for the exact level of funding as the previous year, **\$1,846,500**. For us, the real keys to a successful budget year are the severity of the winter season and the corresponding cost of fuel. We understand pretty well what it costs to operate most of the town services for a full budget cycle, but winter weather and now fuel pricing can and has made a mess of our best-formed plans.

Article 3 seeks to fund our established reserve funds for future capital purchases. We had planned to increase the highway equipment fund contribution, but again based on current economic conditions no increase is requested and the amount that is proposed stands at **\$127,500**. Total proposed town appropriations are \$1,974,000 (down 7%) from \$2,132,000 in 2008. Factoring in projected revenues of \$947,166, also down from the previous year (\$1,105,166), the proposed dollars from taxation to fund town services for 2009 stands at **\$1,026,834** (equal to the 2008 net appropriation), which results in no increase in the town portion of the property tax rate.

The loser in the budget is pavement maintenance. As previously indicated all large-scale work on Brook Road has been shelved for the current year. We do hope to do a small section using the typically available pavement maintenance funds from the operating budget. The town office is also pursuing additional hazard mitigation grant funding (now available as a result of the Ice Storm declaration) for Willow Brook Road. Thanks to the efforts of a lot of people including residents and businesses that wrote letters in support, our first hazard mitigation effort yielded \$263,000 for the phase I work.

Article 4 is at the request/suggestion of the state of NH Department of Revenue and seeks to discontinue three reserve funds that have zero balances and are no longer in regular use (Police Cruiser Fund, Town Hall Renovations Fund, ADA Access Fund).

Article 5 and 6 are at the request of the Conservation Commission and seek voter authority to allow the commission, when it deems appropriate, to spend local funds on projects outside of our town boundaries. As I understand it, currently the Conservation Commission cannot contribute to organizations or projects that might benefit our own conservation goals if the work lies outside the boundary of our town even if the project abuts our own conserved lands.

Article 7 and 8 are the customary Kimball Union Academy tax exemption and study committee articles. See the study committee's report in the annual report or on the town website for more details.

Article 9 is the petitioned warrant article seeking to remove the use of photographs from the town's assessing toolbox. The management team of the town remains opposed to this article. Removing the photos from the records will, in our view, make our assessing system less transparent and more challenging

for our own assessor and taxpayers to compare and contrast properties. The photos are valued highly enough that the Selectboard authorized the expenditure of an additional \$4,000 as part of the 2008 update to have new photos taken. This was done to insure that they depict the properties in their current up to date condition. These photos are taken from either the fronting street or driveway leading to the primary structure. In other words the photos are identical to those you would see in a real estate listing or in a commercial appraisal.

Article 10 is a request to establish a trust fund for municipal projects that might be nice to do, but don't rise to the level of importance that demands public tax dollars. The trust is to be privately funded from donations with a local committee to determine and recommend to the Selectboard whether a particular request receives funding. The idea comes from resident Bill McGonigle, who if nothing else, has received an education on how difficult it is to work in the public sector with private funds. The warned article, as edited to meet state requirements, reads very differently from the article that he proposed to the Selectboard. The Selectboard supports the forward thinking nature of this article and shares his frustrations on how difficult it can be to do in the public sector what the private sector does routinely.

Article 11 authorizes the annual appointment of the finance committee. This group continues to be highly valued during our budgeting process. This year their input helped shaped several of our key decisions.

Article 12 establishes a committee to prepare for the town's 250th anniversary of being in existence (2011). This sounds like a heck of a good idea for a party, perhaps a big one.

Article 13 and 14 accepts the town reports and transacts any last minute business.

In summary, please take the time to read the town report and participate in annual meeting. Join us in taking pride in what we, as a community, have accomplished together, criticize us for decisions you feel we made incorrectly and most importantly help plan and prioritize for the coming year what we should try to accomplish. In my view, Plainfield has been well served for many years by its traditional form of governance. Please, lend your experiences and talents to the challenges we now face.

The Selectboard will be continuing with their outreach program starting on March 18th when they meet at the Plainfield Library starting at 6pm.

Stephen Halleran