

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator
By Stephen Halleran

2010 Budget Update, “the big picture”: The Selectboard, as a first step in the budget process, has facilitated the annual update of the town’s capital improvements plan met with both the School Board and the town’s Finance Committee. From these meetings we have learned that the school is facing some environmental issues within the school building structure mainly centered on the 1989 addition. To the good, two long-term school building loans that the community has been paying off are just about completed and may free up enough operating capital to address these latest issues. Having this information from the school, the Selectboard offered to the School Board that the town is continuing to struggle with how to proceed with the “Brook Road” reconstruction. A fully funded, outside contractor-completed rebuild of the road for \$2 million dollars seems to be a nonstarter. Yet something has to be done and to the extent that it is possible, we need to coordinate our capital projects with the school’s plans.

Enter into these discussions the town’s Finance Committee, a majority of which again this year feels that in deference to the economy incurring significant debt for either the town or school should be avoided. The result is a focus on earmarking additional local town funding sources for paved roads. So, while we have no plans for purchasing any new equipment, we do plan to continue to offer a full slate of capital reserve contributions. Given that the highway bridge fund has about \$114,000 balance and at the moment no real pressing bridge issues we may direct some of what would have been future contributions to this fund to the Highway Transportation Fund to purchase additional pavement. Likewise the beginnings of a two year plan to repair the worst sections of the remaining Willow Brook Road followed by repaving and overlaying the entire roadway with a wearing course of pavement are starting to take shape. Funding to come from a combination of operating budget funds, reserves, and hopefully FEMA grant monies.

Concerning road reconstruction what we think that we have learned is that once the road base is stabilized the best use of our limited paving resource is to not fret over perfection, but rather to get as much distance as is possible each year with new paving. The problem comes when, like the Brook Road, the condition deteriorates to the point where you have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars rebuilding the entire road. The good news is that in the last twenty years the town has completely rebuilt a lot of its 46 miles of paved roads (River, Jenny, Daniels, Bean, Westgate, Beauty Hill Colby, Methodist Hill, Center of Town, Penniman and Hayward) consequently we should over the next decade be able to begin focusing repair work on just the worst sections of these roads and freshening the pavement top on the rest. The School Street overlay this past summer is a great example of this kind of thinking.

The two town budget hearings for this year are planned for January 20th and February 3rd at 7pm here at the Meriden Town Hall. In preparation for these the Selectboard will be meeting with the Finance Committee again on December 16th and likely January 6th. If you have strong feelings about these issues or other town budgetary questions please join us.

Zoning Changes for 2010: The Planning Board is holding a hearing on December 21st to discuss two proposed changes to our zoning ordinance. The first change is an attempt to increase the availability of rental housing here in Plainfield. If approved, Accessory Apartments (defined as one bedroom, one bathroom, no larger than 800 sq feet and attached to the main dwelling by weather tight space) would be able to be constructed throughout town with just a building permit. Currently, other than the VR zone a special exception by the Board of Adjustment is required. While the ZBA has a very well established and efficient process for reviewing these applications the hope is that by eliminating this step residents interested in having a small apartment in their home will be more likely to act on the idea, thus expanding available housing options in town.

The second change establishes very basic guidelines for the review and permitting of wind powered generators. At its most basic level, if you want a single generating windmill to serve an established use (house or business) that has an over all height of less than 100’ the process is pretty easy. As the generating towers become larger and are more numerous the review process, not surprisingly, gets more

complex. The entire proposed regulation is pretty basic and simply fills a void in our zoning ordinance, which at the moment is silent on these devices. To date we have reviewed wind powered generators based on a section of the zoning ordinance which requires structures over 35' to obtain a special exception. The proposed ordinance will be an improvement, which should assist residents who are interesting in establishing wind power as an accessory to their home or business.

The full text of these changes is posted on the town website at www.plainfieldnh.org/planning.html

Cable Expansion: So far our list of places to push for expansion of cable lines includes: Porter Road, Corydon Turnpike, Daniels and River Road. Its not to late to fire up your neighborhood and make the list. Contact the town office if you want in.

Town E-mail List: Were you one of the first to know that the town tax rate had stayed the same for 2009? If you subscribe to the town e-mail list you were. If you want this kind of information (we promise no spam, no stupid advertisements for products you don't need) sign up today at <http://www.plainfieldnh.org/mail.html>

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