

## News from the Desk of the Town Administrator

By Stephen Halleran

**2010 Budget/Town Meeting Update:** The Selectboard held the first of two budget hearings on January 20<sup>th</sup> this hearing also included the fourth meeting with the Finance Committee. The proposed town operating budget of \$1,885,544 represents a 2.11% increase going back to 2008; the 2009 operating budget was unchanged at \$1,846,500. The budget does include a 2.5% wage increase for town employees. In 2009 there were no wage increases for town employees. The town has also experienced significant increases to our employee health insurance program, both from rate hikes as well as employees opting for more expansive plans depending on whether or not a spouse has access to or has lost their coverage at work. Again, this year the Selectboard budget is very plain, not a lot new or different in the package.

While we have managed to budget for essentially the status quo in the operating budget we were not, in deference to the economy able to funnel as much money to paved roads as we had hoped. Rather than placing \$75,000 in the Transportation Improvements Fund we will now essentially level fund our reserves, but directing the \$10,000 that would typically go into the bridge fund into the transportation fund. There is some hope that if the highway department operating costs can be held at 2009 levels we might be able to encumber at the end of this year an additional \$15,000 from the operating budget for 2011 pavement work. The current plan remains for us to be done with improvements to Willow Brook Road by the end of the construction season in 2011. We continue to wait to hear on our 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> FEMA grant requests.

Concerning special warrant articles, the Selectboard is recommending the replacement of one of the highway department's heavy dump trucks. The adopted capital improvements plan calls for replacement of two between now and 2012. This remains the plan, however, the first replacement is to be moved up a year so that we can buy the last year of proven technology rather than the first year of new technology. The purchase of the truck would be funded from reserves and does not impact the 2010 tax rate. We will continue to refine the truck replacement package right up until the time of the meeting.

The Selectboard is also proposing that \$5,000 be placed in the town fund for barrier free access projects. The Meriden Library building is not ADA complaint and in follow up to last year's annual meeting we need to develop a plan to gain compliance and start setting aside some funding. This contribution is a step in that direction.

The town's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Committee formed at last year's town meeting has request the first of two \$3,500 stipends for their efforts. Much like the service memorial and the history book projects their hope is to return all of the front money back to the town treasury. In this case, from private donations and proceeds earned during the event.

There is an article on the warrant, by request of the Plainfield Library Trustees, to move to library management model that utilizes a full-time benefited library director. The additional cost for 2010 is \$16,800 the Trustee's estimate that full year will add about \$20,000 to the operating budget. At this time the Selectboard, due to the proposal's short and long-term budgetary impact, is not in support of this article. The Selectboard does not question the quality of either town library, its just very difficult to support any staff expansion in a time when residents are being laid off at their jobs or having their own work hours reduced.

At the end of the day, if all proposals are approved as presented we will require \$69,000 in additional tax dollars (6.41%) to fund town operations resulting in a town tax rate impact of about \$.25/\$1,000. The Select board supported package stands at \$51,939 or an increase of 4.85%

Unrelated to budgetary issues, but certainly related to discussions that we had this fall with our Library Trustees, there is an article on the warrant, again by request, that asks the voters to consider merging the two library trustees boards into a single board with governance over the entire library system in town. This would result in a single board of five trustees (odd number required by state law) with a single library budget to include the operations of the two library buildings. Our survey of surrounding town's and how

they manage public libraries suggest that while both approaches are used, a single board of trustees is more commonly used regardless of the number of public buildings rather than separate board's for each building. There is agreement that this article is not about saving operating money, it is about developing a single strategic planning process focused on delivering library services to the entire town rather than two separate organizations each thinking about their individual needs. The Selectboard supports this type of thinking and also supports the idea of taking action rather than just forming a committee to do a study. The Board believes that town meeting wisdom will efficiently decide this issue on the merits. If the direction is to merge so be it, if the direction is that the town is better served by the status quo- two separate boards, that's equally fine. In short, it's why we have town meetings.

**Town E-mail List:** Have you taken the time to sign up for the town e-mail list yet? Sign up anytime at <http://www.plainfieldnh.org/mail.html> We are still improving our use of the system, but I think its fair to say that those who have signed up are finding the updates and bits of information at least entertaining if not useful.

Stephen Halleran