

News from the Town Administrator

By Stephen Halleran

Dec/January

The Selectmen were pleased to participate on Sunday November 18th in Plainfield Village resident Virginia Drye's tribute to sons of Plainfield who served in WWI. Selectman Taylor was the master of ceremonies and Selectman Eberhardt played Taps on his trumpet. It's nice to see a young person in our community with a high interest in civic activities.

The early winter has not helped our highway department project wrap up plan one bit. We still intend to install guardrail at both new bridges, but final landscaping and pavement will have to wait till spring now. An early Thanksgiving with snow on the ground before that equals a very long winter season. When Thanksgiving is early and snow arrives more than a week before that your talking Laura Ingalls Wilder Long Winter type stuff. Yikes.

The Selectmen are in full budget mode at this time having met once with the Finance Committee and holding budget discussions at every meeting now. The magnitude of the fall tax bills were a shock to some, but the reality is that if we don't change program in some meaningful way, the bills are not going to change much. In short words, to lower the tax bill requires the community making a decision to do less of something at the school and town level. The math just doesn't work otherwise. At the town level we are, again, looking at a fairly vanilla flavored operating budget, but even that requires an additional \$15-\$20,000 in funding just to stay even. Our first budget hearing will be on Wednesday January 16th at the Meriden Town Hall starting at 7pm. A second hearing will be held on February 6th at the Plainfield Library also at 7pm.

The transition from two private fire companies to a single municipal fire department is moving along as directed by last town meeting. In finalizing the transaction there is approximately \$134,000 of debt that must be settled. The current plan is to utilize a portion of the town's undesignated fund balance to eliminate the debt and give the new municipal department a clean slate going forward. The town's undesignated fund balance stands at around \$800,000. We typically avoid using these funds for capital purchases or operational expenses. The funds are intended to assist with emergencies and very unusual circumstances, once in a life time things. Creating a municipal fire department might well fit into this category where using fund balance has merit.

Meriden Library Project remains in full swing, full building design and fund raising are now occurring simultaneously, both driving toward an early February date when a decision will be made as to whether the project is a go for vote approval in 2019.

As you can see there is a lot going on, so if you have the interest in any of these things, now is the time to attend a meeting or two and let your voice be heard.

Don't forget the final event of the season in the Plainfield Town Hall is our Town Christmas Celebration held on Sunday December 9th from 4pm to 6pm. Come enjoy the holiday spirit and get to know some of our new community members. Its always a great time! Happy Holidays to all.

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Town Zoning Ordinance Review: The Planning and Zoning Boards have recently held two joint meetings to discuss the town's zoning ordinance. The latest meeting included Town Counsel Barry Schuster. The town's zoning ordinance was born in 1973 and at that time was mainly boiler plate language fed to us from the Upper Valley Regional Planning Commission. Over the year's the document has been amended many times to reflect current thinking or to include some new land use item. Cell towers and solar panels are two recent examples where language was added to the ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance has a tough job; it's almost never universally popular. The limiting of what a private landowner can and cannot do with their property is not a task to be taken lightly. Plainfield would be a very different place without the ordinance. Chairman Colburn of the town's Zoning Board of Adjustment said it very well at one of these recent meetings. Plainfield's land use boards try very hard to insure that landowners can use their property as they desire, but in a way that does not negatively impact their neighbors. In a nutshell under our ordinance you can live on the land, farm it and have a home occupation by right. Most other uses require Zoning Board review, a public hearing of the issues if you will.

Our recent review has focused in part on how business uses are handled under the ordinance. As we know, Plainfield has become very much a bedroom town for the Lebanon/Claremont area job market. Most people who live in a residential setting these days have an expectation that homes will be the predominate use in their neighborhood. For the most part this is true, however, with ZBA approval any of us are allowed to have a single business operated from our home with up to seven employees. All businesses that don't include a residential component must be located on state highway, Route 12A, 120 or Stage Road. The town's land use board's currently see no compelling reason not to keeping the existing system in place, but there is some discussion about whether a home based business of up to seven employees might be too large for a residential neighborhood. Your thoughts?

Allowing ground mounted solar of up to 15kW in most zones as a right rather than a request is under consideration. Right now, any ground mounted array over 7kW requires ZBA review. Roof top arrays are allowed by right. Our land use boards feel strongly that the existing requirement that lots in the Village Zone require a special exception for ground mounted solar should remain. These are typically small parcels of land and it just seems that some communication between neighbors can't be a bad thing. Again, your thoughts?

The boards are also taking a close look at how our ordinance handles housing options. As we all know, housing is in short supply in the Upper Valley. Three years ago Plainfield followed Lebanon and began allowing an accessory dwelling unit as a second home on a lot. This it hoped would give property owners an opportunity to provide

modest housing to family members or as an income source. We have seen some units created this way, but here too the development costs are very expensive.

Keeping the ordinance simple and easy to understand is also part of these discussions. We feel strongly that anyone should be able to pick up a copy of the document and very quickly determine what they or their neighbors might be able to do and not do with their property. We have identified some confusing language in the document and asked Town Counsel to simplify it.

We don't expect any wholesale changes to the Zoning Ordinance, if it's not broken don't fix it. However, some changes could be forthcoming. If you feel strongly about any of these or some other land use topic please let us know. Send me an e-mail or stop in the town office and talk. Give Dick Colburn, ZBA Chair or Jane Stephenson PB Chair a call. It is after all your town.

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Property Revaluation: The new property values are out and on average homes saw a total increase in value of about 12% since 2013. So that house that was assessed at \$200,000 now stands at something like \$224,000. This was a statistical update, effectively a mathematical modeling exercise based on qualified sales over the last year. Meaning sales that had a willing seller and a willing buyer come to an arrangement. No divorces, forced sales, no connection between the buyer and seller. To be qualified the property must have been publically on the market. So, you start with dozens of sales and when you get all done you hope you have at least a few dozen remaining that fit the criteria. A real bummer for Plainfield is that sales that involve current use land are always thrown out. That's a big disqualifier for small NH town's where all the land that can be is enrolled in the current use program. The good news is that because our market is strong, we have had enough sales to give Avitar a useable sample. Remember, we have to defend all of our work to the state of New Hampshire which monitors all revaluations and all NH assessing practices. Long gone are the days that three Selectmen sit around the table and decide tax values. The Selectmen remain the statutory assessors for the town, but effectively all this work is now done by professional with specific training in their field.

So, if your new valuation number has you concerned and or you just think your property would benefit from an inspection, call that number in the notification letter, **1-603-798-4017 before October 4th** and make an appointment for a review. During the review, which is held here at town hall, you can request a site visit and they will do that visit right on the spot. We encourage you to take advantage of this, particularly if you have an older, dated home that has not been inspected in a decade. It can't hurt, unless you have in the dark of night made lots of improvements without permits. If you have, we can't help with that.

Bridge Update: Both new timber bridges are in and being finished up. Camp Road is open, but still needs a wearing course on the top deck, likely 2"x10" pressure treated boards screwed down to it. Houser Lane traffic is still on the temporary bridge while the new one is being buttoned up, but that's just because its available to us. We have a maximum budget for the two projects of \$230,000, as of this writing we stand at \$205,000 with guardrail and paved approaches to follow. Needless to say the funds are tight.

Meriden Library Replacement: The Library Trustees have approved spending \$15,000 from private funds to further the design efforts for the new building. We remain 100% committed to bringing before the town a project that costs less than \$1,000,000 and includes at least 50% of the building funded through private donations. We are also committed to bringing a project to town meeting that has near full certainty as to its cost. To do this means we have to work very closely with the folks we think might build the structure for us and effectively fully design the entire project from the first day of work

to the final polishing of the door handles before the ribbon is cut. This process is time consuming and expensive, but it means when you vote on the project and it is approved you will get that new library that is energy efficient “Ready for 100,” accessible to all, for that price, no surprises. No reading in the paper some morning over first cup that the cost is really \$1.2 million and we have a deficit to be filled with tax dollars. Not on our watch. So whether you can support this project or not the fundamental commitments that were made at last town meeting are in place and will not change.

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Bonner Road Traffic Calming: The Selectmen authorized adding fog lines to the line striping on Bonner Road and all new road signs including school zone related signs are being installed on Bonner Road in time for opening day. These are the new high visibility signs. These actions are intended to assist in slowing traffic speed on the road. Several versions of solar powered electronic speed signs are also being considered, and if approved by the select board and school board should be installed this fall. For the moment, speed bumps or the idea of a three way stop at School Street and Bonner Road are on hold. The Selectboard would like to exhaust other approaches before making a traffic pattern change.

Property Revaluation: This project is continuing and you should very soon receive in the mail your notice of value. We have been fortunate this summer in that we have had a lot of sales in Plainfield across a variety of property types. Avitar is developing a model that predicts market value based on qualified sales. So, as you would expect, more sales makes for a much better revaluation. Stay tuned, those new values are coming.

Lowering our Tax Bills: The tax rate is essentially the total amount of money we spend less revenues, divided by value of all our taxable property. So, we either build the base of the equation (the grand list), find new revenue sources or we shrink the top of the equation, our spending. It's unlikely that we can bring enough value in to really make a difference; what you need is a lot of finished space that no one lives in (second homes like the old Eastman development in Grantham) or some office spaces. But it would take a lot of new taxable value to lower the tax rate significantly. In round numbers every 10 million in new value would lower the tax rate one dollar. Big box stores or factories don't do it, lots of space, but low value space at that. Now other revenue sources would be nice, but for the most part they are just a tax by another name. Sure we can develop user fees to target specific things, but again it takes \$269,000 in new revenue to lower the rate one dollar. I am guessing a \$20 trash sticker would be a nonstarter. Same for a \$4,000 permit for a new house. So, unless we think we get the Amazon headquarters here in Plainfield (think of the traffic that would bring) the better approach maybe to let the grand list continue to grow steadily and to focus our efforts at the school, town and county spending. If we can do that, we can hold our tax rate steady and maybe even push it back a little. So, here at the local level if this is an issue of importance to you, spend some time this fall helping the town, school and county lower expenses. Decide you can live with a little less and our tax rate will be a little less, it's that simple. You need to attend a meeting or two and voice an opinion.

Bridge Update: We are right in the middle of both bridge projects. By the time you read this the Camp Road bridge will be open and the Houser Lane bridge will follow shortly. The new bridges are wooden laminated structures from Hansen Bridge of Springfield NH. Both will accept all legally loaded vehicles and come with an expected life of 50 years. Thank you to all the Camp Road, Hopkins Road residents who have put up with

the bridge closure. Its not been any fun for them, but the good news is that its behind us now.

GIS System: As advertised, the town's new GIS system is now up and running, if you want to take it for a test drive visit the town's webpage www.plainfieldnh.org and follow the link found in the news section. You can view your property information as well as parcel data from anywhere that you have an internet connection. The system is a great tool for our land use boards who can now, in a meeting, view a subject property and how it relates to abutters and other features. It's a very valuable tool that we are convinced will actually save the town money.

Meriden Library Replacement: Why would we do this? I just said spending less is the key to slowing our tax rate growth. The simple fact is we have many years ago decided we value learning and education in our Plainfield experience. Libraries are a key piece to adult learning. Plainfield is fortunate to have two libraries, one in each village, within walking distance to many homes. The dollars needed to fund the capital portion of the new building are already in your tax bill, where the money going forward is that we are going to propose a building that has very low operating and maintenance costs. It's going to sip energy rather than devour it. If we are going to have two libraries, the Plainfield way is to make them accessible to all and make them buildings that your children's children will be proud to call their own. Come to some of the meetings on the new library, check out the town website, and view the model. You have several very talented committees working on this issue. I think you will be pleased at how well thought out the new proposed library is. In the end, like taxes the voters will decide the issue, to that end we are going to offer up a project that will have a significant private funding component and when constructed will serve our community for generations to come.

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Property Revaluation: Our state constitution now requires that town's update their property valuations at least once every five years. Back in the early 1980's often we'd be ten maybe even fifteen years between updates. I can remember when our tax rate was more than \$60 per thousand (Its \$28.25 now), however our property values for taxation equated to something like 37% of market value. They are about 95% of market value now. So, some new resident would buy a house for \$100,000 come running into town hall and discover we were assessing his place for taxes at \$37,000. Out the door he'd go as fast as he could, thinking he was getting away with something. Sorry, not the case, everyone was at 37% and the tax rate was \$60+! This is exactly why you can't compare one town's published tax rate to another, unless you make certain that the rate has been equalized so that everyone's assessment level is the same. Lebanon has a full time assessor they are current with their values. Plainfield's tax values are current as of 4/1/2013, Grantham might be 4/1/2015, Cornish 4/1/2016. If you do want to compare one town to another go to <https://www.revenue.nh.gov/mun-prop/property/equalization-2016/documents/full-value-ranking.pdf> using those rates you can fairly see what a house in Cornish would pay as compared to Plainfield or Lebanon.

So, as the summer moves on you will be soon be notified by Avitar that your new valuation has been set. In all likelihood the new value won't look significantly different than the old value unless you have made a lot of improvements to your home that you never told the town about. In this case, we can't help you. When you get your new value, don't apply the current tax rate to it. That calculation has no value and only leads to upset. Instead, spend your time reviewing the details of your tax card, making sure that the underlying assumptions (quality of construction, details of the building like size, number of bathrooms, bedrooms) are accurate and properly listed. Come see us at the own office we can help. Take advantage of the taxpayer review process. There will be opportunities for everyone to come in and meet with the assessing team and review the details of their property. There is no cost and the cost of the update is the same whether one taxpayer comes in or we all do. Compare your Plainfield home to other Plainfield homes that you know that are reasonably similar. Make some allowances for differences in location, quality etc. In most cases, you'll find that the assessment work is very accurate and has been reasonable well done. If you show the appraisers legitimate listing errors or provide new information, often adjustments do result. When you meet with the appraisers bring them all the information you have, cost data, mortgage appraisals are all good information. Keep in mind that there is no exact right answer an appraisal is nothing more than an educated guess. A bank appraisal and town tax appraisal that are within say 10%-15% of each other are more or less the same. In short words, you will never in our five year cycle have a better, less expensive opportunity to influence your tax appraisal than right now, in an appraisal year. Take advantage of the review process, it's a free bite at the apple.

Alternatively, you can take a less reasoned approach and do as one fellow told me years ago, he was selling his Plainfield house and moving to Meriden where the taxes are cheaper! Not a good plan buddy, we are one town with the same tax rate.

Next time we will dive into how to lower your tax bill, hint the answer is not to move from one side to the other, its way easier than that.

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April 15th & 16th two days of rain, sleet, snow and wind with temps in the low 30's left us with multiple power outages around town, and difficult travel. Town office operated on our standby generator all day on Monday the 16th, and the Sox for the first time since 1985 cancelled the Patriots Day game. Kind of hard to get into spring mode with those conditions, but we will try.

Highway: The good news is that mud season has been kind of a dud this year. The slow even glacial at times spring has allowed the roads to thaw slowly (roads like meat for supper remain unworkable if they are "unthawed") and without major incidents. Plainfield's resident Toyota Prius fleet has mostly been unencumbered. This is not to say that some roads aren't rough and in need of attention. **Spring grading begins on May 7th.**

If you live on Camp Road or Houser Lane stay tuned for bridge updates and such. We will keep you fully apprised of all developments using the town's homepage plainfieldnh.org. Camp Road work should begin shortly after school is out. Understanding that residents on the far side of the bridge will have to go down into Cornish to reach Rte 120 we pledge to do all that we can to keep the bridge closure period as brief as possible. Houser Lane will begin with the installation of a temporary bridge. Other than the covered bridge there is no way to access that part of town without the Houser Lane bridge, therefore the temporary bridge is necessary. The old Houser Lane bridge might be taken out anytime as the temporary bridge will serve nicely until the new bridge is put into service. So in this case the work zone will stay up longer, but residents will have few if any delays in crossing Blood Brook.

Police: Responding to safety concerns about pedestrian crossing of Route 12A in Plainfield Village during events at the Plainfield Town Hall the Selectmen have received permission from the NHDOT to utilize temporary safety measures on this state highway like road signs and cones during busy events. In addition, as scheduling allows, a Plainfield Police officer will be present to slow traffic down during busy times.

GIS Data: Later this summer, as part of the assessing update Plainfield's tax map data will be available online as part of a web based GIS system. This will finally allow us to begin to use our tax mapping data in a more complete way. You will be able to view all the parcels in town with various overlays such as satellite imagery, wetlands, FEMA flood maps, basic assessing data, trails, etc. Back in 2003 the town's Conservation Commission allocated \$50,000 from the town's Conservation Fund to purchase for the town truly well done tax maps to serve as a base line for land use planning and conservation. Since then we have updating the data annually and had the paper copies of the maps available at town hall and as pdf files online. This next step will complete the project allowing the maps to be used as the Conservation Commission had envisioned as a planning tool for our town government and the public alike. If you'd like to see an example of what the system will be like, visit <https://www.axisgis.com/deerfieldnh/>

anything new, the system takes a little getting used to, but once you get accustomed to the basic tool menu the information that is available to you is pretty impressive and should serve our community very well going forward.

Stop in and say hello either at the Meriden Town Hall or twice a month over at the Plainfield Library. Call anytime if there is something bothering you often we can help or at least give you the town view of a situation. Case in point, the plans for the new Meriden Library **do not** include a provision for an ATM machine. Not even sure how that one got started, but we are not planning to enter the banking business. Likewise the meeting room might include a small kitchen area (no stove), but we have no plans for serving regular meals; we will leave that to Poor Thoms and the Village Haunt.

Think spring it has been a long wintah and we all need to get it and see some sun!

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Town Meeting 2018 decisively set us on a course that includes the merger of the town's two fire departments into a single municipal department, the endorsement of plans to bring forward a project to replace the Meriden Library and a strong commitment to renewable energy.

This is what we know today:

Fire Departments: Over the course of the next year we will set up the transfer of assets and liabilities of our two independent fire departments to the Town of Plainfield, making a single municipal fire department. Our mandate is to have the work done one year from the town meeting vote (3/17/18). Practically speaking it will make the most sense to have the new system in place for 01/01/19, since this is the start of a new budget year for the town. Both the Plainfield and Meriden Fire Associations will continue to exist and will play a key roll in supporting our new municipal fire department. In all cases, the entire team is committed to making this a seamless transition for everyone, fire personnel, town staff and most importantly our residents. This is one of those projects that if you don't notice any changes, that means it is going very smoothly.

Meriden Library: The clock is now ticking some 300+ days to the next town meeting to put before voters a plan to replace the Meriden Library with a new slightly larger, more functional, energy efficient building that will be accessible to all. The group working on this project has committed that no more than 50% of the cost of the project will come from property taxes. A significant private funding raising campaign is planned and will supplement the already significant private funds that have been set aside for the replacement/renovation of the building. This is a project that you should be hearing a lot about in the next few months. Many opportunities are planned for residents to weigh in on the design of the new facility. Please attend a hearing or to comment on draft plans and conceptual building renderings. The project is likely to involve a building of about 3,600 sq ft on a single floor. The current facility is 2,400 sq ft on two floors. I think we will get the best possible outcome if we can engage a large number of residents in the planning process.

Renewable Energy: In two votes Plainfield expressed its strong commitment to work toward a future of reliance on renewable energy sources. The Ready for 100 Initiative looks to have Plainfield using 100% renewable electricity by 2030 and for all energy uses by 2050. It's a lofty goal, but as was said at town meeting, whether we can reverse climate change or not is unclear, but we know we are better off to try than to not try. In keeping with that theme, by raising the exemption amount from \$50,000 to \$300,000 voters essentially made Plainfield tax exempt for all solar other than commercial generation that is the primary use of the lot. The message being clear, solar welcome here! Solar installs designed to meet the needs of residential, commercial or institutional buildings on the lot all work toward our goal of 100% renewable energy by 2030.

So, as you can see it was a very significant town meeting that will be shaping Plainfield for many years to come. If any of these topics interest you, we are always looking for assistance, contact me, Fire Chief Taylor, Library Director Mary King or Steve Ladd Chairman of the Energy Committee.

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The town report is at the printer, the agenda for town meeting set. There were no significant changes since last month. If you want to view the warrant and budget anytime, go to www.plainfieldnh.org anytime and just click on the warrant/budget link.

As we do from time to time, I dusted off an old town report to see what the hot button issues in our little hamlet where one hundred years ago this March. I read with interest that in 1918 the town had paid out \$11.40 for the confirmed death of 57 hedgehogs (porcupines). You presented the nose to the Selectmen for payment. Similarly, the town paid \$2.00 each to Otis Jordan, Parker Jordan and Charles Williams in bounty for Bobcat kills. A bobcat season in the State of New Hampshire is politically out of the question these days, yet back then these cats were deemed a nuisance animal like the hedgehog.

Voters were asked to spend \$700 for an Iron bridge near the Brook Schoolhouse so called. Another \$150 was to be used to fight White Pine blister rust around town.

In their annual report the Selectmen were proud to announce that beginning April 1st Plainfield residents could use the town's ward bed at Mary Hitchcock Hospital for \$12/day plus an operating room fee of \$3 or \$5 depending on the complexity of the surgery. \$15 today doesn't get you an aspirin, much less your appendices out and a bed for the night!

The Town was in the business of purchasing two new snow rollers. At this time the town had more sleighs than cars. If you had a car you put it up in the winter. So, you packed the roads, rather than plowed them. We even paid someone to shovel snow into the covered bridge so that your sleigh ran nicely over the wooden deck. The unusually harsh winter of 1918 had with "great depth of snow" burdened the town with "road breaking bills" in excess of \$500.

The School District was having concerns about the cost of labor in the area, of particular concern were the various outhouses, which by all accounts had fallen into terrible disrepair. A plan to correct this deficiency had been developed and was ready for implementation, but it was going to cost some money and taxpayers had to be prepared for some sticker shock.

So, there you have it, back a hundred years ago they too gathered on a cold and windy March afternoon to discuss and debate the current issues of the day, making the best decisions they were able with the information they had to go on. You have that same opportunity and duty today as a resident of Plainfield. The 2017 annual report should be in your mail box any moment now. No one knows how the March 2018 meeting will go, but I do know that the bathroom facilities at the school are working fine, that alone should help attendance!

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Budget/Warrant Update: The Selectmen held the first of two budget hearings on Wednesday January 17th. As currently configured the spending plan calls for a total increase of dollars from taxation of about \$105,000, \$75,000 of which are new reserve funds, a \$25,000 increase to our highway equipment reserve, \$25,000 for a fire equipment reserve fund and \$25,000 for a Meriden Library Building fund. The \$105,000 equates to a relatively steep 7.3% increase and would add \$.40 to the overall tax rate. The increase to the highway equipment reserve fund has been talked about and deferred for the last several years. The reality is that it takes at least \$75,000 per year to insure that we have adequate reserves to replace the essential highway equipment. The \$50,000 contribution has not been increased in many years and to each year we defer it, the deeper we dig the future hole for ourselves. **A second budget hearing is scheduled for Wednesday February 7th at the Plainfield Library beginning at 6:30pm.** You can always view the latest version of the town budget and town meeting warrant at www.plainfieldnh.org. There are a variety of links within the webpage, the easiest to find with the fewest clicks is right off the homepage.

Garbage and Recycling: The conversion from Friday recycling to doing trash and recycling on the same day, has gone relatively well, at least as well as these things typically go. Again, if you don't have the flyer, download it right from the homepage of the town's webpage. The only significant change to the program is that we now put our garbage and recycling out the same day. Two trucks are in town, a waste collection truck and a recycling collection truck. Each is doing the route, but they might be separated by as much as an hour or two. So don't fret if the garbage leaves first, the recycling truck will be right behind it. The Selectmen have extended the curbside program for 2018 and 2019. The cost of the collection program is high \$167,000+ per year. Consequently, there is a plan to create a study group to look at options beyond 2019. If the subject interests you and you'd like to help, please contact me. We have enjoyed town sponsored curbside collection of trash since 1973 and the collection of recyclables curbside since 1991. The program has changed a lot since then and its likely time for a review and reexamination. Doesn't mean we won't make the same decision, but we should explore options and make an informed choice. We have more options now than ever before. We could even add a curbside compost option, if that was something residents wanted.

Meriden Library Building Committee: This group has been meeting regularly since late summer and is moving forward with plans to offer a replacement options for the Meriden Building. The next major step in this process is for the group to report back to the community at the upcoming town meeting. At town meeting residents will learn about basic plans for the new building, cost estimates and funding sources. Residents will be asked to vote to establish a reserve fund for the eventual project (the \$25,000 above). If, after hearing the logic, the community decides not to fund the reserve, then the message is no new building right now. If the vote is in the affirmative, that will be a message to the committee to keep working. Right now the plan is to bring forward a proposal for the actual construction project as early as 2019.

So as you will see from reviewing the warrant, between the project to convert the two private fire companies to municipal agencies, the budget, the renewable energy initiatives and the Meriden Library Building replacement, there is going to be plenty to discuss at the 2018 town meeting. Lets fill the school gymnasium with residents on March 17th roll up ourselves and collectively chart a course for the future in Plainfield. We need your help we need your input, come join in.

Steve Halleran

News from the Town Administrator
By Stephen Halleran

Taxes, Taxes, Taxes: The Selectmen established the 2018 property tax rate in early October at \$28.25 down a dime from last year's \$28.35. So, if nothing has changed on the assessing side, your tax bill should be down a little for 2017, nice. In doing this the Selectboard was also able to raise an additional \$40,000 toward unreserved fund balance, a move that is entirely within their purview as Selectboard and as we have discussed many times in the past is a move designed to insure the town's financial health moving forward for years to come. In the short term the Selectboard can give you any tax rate you want, its tax rate stability over many years that is much harder to achieve. The town has something like \$750,000 now in fund balance, a number the Selectboard feel is, based on our size, about right for dealing with an unforeseen natural disaster like a major flood or ice storm that did significant damage to the town.

Tax bills are due December 4th and any taxpayer who feels that their assessment is disproportionate to other similar property's in town has until March 1st to file a tax abatement asking for a local review. My tax bill is too high is the wrong approach, my house is assessed incorrectly for the following reasons is the right approach. The town has until June 1st to issue a decision on the request. Once a taxpayer has tried the local approach, and is still not satisfied, he or she is then free to pursue other remedies (court or Board of Land and Tax Appeals). In nearly all cases we are able to successfully resolve the issue locally. Case in point, the Town's Assessor has been able to bring forward to the Selectmen a possible local settlement of Plainfield's portion of the FairPoint tax appeal. Some years ago telecom companies became subject to property taxes, a tax they had previously been exempted from by state law. To be fair, they paid another tax to the state and that tax sunset, went away. As you can imagine, a state wide property tax war broke out and has been waged now for years. FairPoint didn't just not like its assessment; they contested being subject to the property tax at all. Our local settlement will result in the town returning to FairPoint about a \$1,000 per year for the four years that have been appealed. This is a very modest sum, given that FairPoint pays the town about \$5,000 per year in taxes on poles and conduit. Going forward a new state law will govern and unify across the state how towns assess telecommunication equipment. Electric companies have paid property taxes for years and in fact we just finished another long standing multi town dispute with the NH Electric Cooperative which had appealed its taxes for many years as well. In that case, the NH Coop essentially withdrew its appeals after getting a Superior Court decision that supported the various towns' assessing methodology. So, to have added to fund balance this fall and to have finished with these two major appeals (ending the uncertainty about multi-year refunds) positions us very nicely going into a new budget year and an assessment update year.

The 2018 revaluation has begun, Avitar is now studying all the various sales in town to try and fully understand them, these sales become the foundation of the new assessing model. This work will continue well into 2018. The expected work flow of the new revaluation is that by late winter early spring taxpayers will be notified of their new

valuations and be given an opportunity to discuss with the assessors their value or anyone else's. The entire data base is public and will be available online for review and scrutiny. Once the reviews are complete, the new assessments will be used next October to establish the 2018 tax rate. All things being equal, assuming property values have appreciated in the last five years and if spending stays the same the tax rate drops, but your individual tax load stays the same. So, by all means save yourself some stress, **do not** take your 2018 new valuation and apply the 2017 tax rate to it, that will just put unnecessary strain on your heart, no good. Concentrate your efforts on making sure we get your property value correct and help the town and school keep costs and expenses down. Your tax bill will take care of itself.

Enjoy the endless fall season, we are moving directly into our budget work now and would love your thoughts on town governance. In absence of direct input the best we can do is provide what we think you want or need. It's a whole lot easier if you tell us what you want.

Steve

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator Sept 2017

By Stephen Halleran

Cornish Fair and apple season, both clear indications that the summer of 2017 is moving along swiftly. The 2017 budget so far is on par with our expectations. As of this writing, there is 36% of the budget year remaining and we have 36% of the budget remaining. The budget is a little tight, but still well within the acceptable range going into fall. The taxpayer me wants it exactly that way, the Town Administrator me would sleep just a little better if we had say 38% of the budget remaining with 36% of the year left.

Senate Bill 38: The good news of the summer for town affairs has been that Governor Sununu and the legislature (SB 38) has made some \$30 million unanticipated dollars available to town's and cities for road and bridge work. Plainfield's apportionment is \$99,000. It is likely that your Selectboard will decide to utilize the funds to replace the Camp Road Bridge, keeping our bridge capital reserve fund intact for work on the Ladeau Road Bridge, the next one on the list. A required public hearing to accept the funds is scheduled for September 6th here at the Meriden Town Hall at 7pm. In my experience you are far more likely to catch one of those old tagged trout still swimming in the Blow-me-down than you are on any given year to get an extra \$100,000 from the State of New Hampshire for local roads and bridges. This truly is very good news that will save the property taxpayers of Plainfield money.

Meriden Library Building Committee: The Trustees have appointed a committee to begin planning for the replacement of the Meriden Library. This group will build on the work done by previous committees who have concluded that the most cost effective way to address the needs of the Meriden Library building is to start over with a new modest facility that will address the needs of our community. The group's first meeting is Tuesday September 5th at 7pm here at the Meriden Town Hall.

Planning and Zoning: It's been a busy summer for the ZBA and Planning Board. Plainfield may well be welcoming three new businesses/organizations to our community. The Mt. Valley Treatment Center has been approved to move its anxiety treatment program for students into the former Home Hill Inn property. The organization specializes in teenage students who attend a 60-90 day program at the facility before returning to their school.

Brite Lite Electric of Windsor Vermont, will be setting up headquarter in the G&S Trucking building on Route 12A in Plainfield Village. They are an electrical contracting firm that operates a half dozen or so trucks. They focus on large residential and commercial projects.

Robert Boylan has just begun the land use planning process for developing a food distribution warehouse on the 3.5 acre parcel formerly B&S Trucking on Route 12A not far from the Edgewater Farm Stand. A lot of details are still unknown, but any opportunity to return that property to productive use seems like a positive. The trucking

business burnt to the ground in the early 1990's and the property has been in a state of flux since that time.

2018 Budget: This is absolutely the right time to be communicating with the Selectboard about any changes you'd like to see in town services. We will soon be starting out work on the new budget. Come see us at an upcoming Selectboard meeting and tell us what you like and what you don't. The Board meets the first and third Wednesday of each month. Check the town website for the exact details. www.plainfieldnh.org

As you can see there are plenty of things to keep us going through late summer and into early fall. If we can help or provide some information on something that has your attention, stop in at either the town offices or the Plainfield Library during office hours and lets talk.

Steve Halleran

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator-July/August 2017

By Stephen Halleran

Cornfield Trout Tournament, June 1991: As with all remembrances, context is important to properly understanding the events. In October of 1989 Plainfield's tax rate had increased a heart stopping 24%. The number of school age children was increasing at a furious pace (remember this was just before cable, we still interacted with our spouses); the town had just added a second full time Police Officer (Larry Dore) and had hired an Administrative Assistant to the Selectboard (me). Now, we constantly grumble about how hard it is to get folks to engage with their local government. I can report to you in no uncertain circumstances that a 24% tax rate increase will get you civic involvement. The "Plainfield Auction Barn Group" was quickly formed and we had all the help from our local citizenry that we could stand. A committee worked on school expenses, another on town expenses, a third committee was studying alternative revenues. User fees for various things was a hot topic. Deforesting and even selling town owned properties was under heavy consideration, anything that could be converted to cash was fair game.

By the spring of 1991, local budgets had been stripped to the bone, the town budget was on emergency rations, the school board had eliminated athletics from the budget and still the taxes they increased. It was time for drastic measures, gambling! What would happen if you fitted a few live trout with special fin tags and released these "lucky fish" into our local brooks along with 1,490 of their untagged tank mates and you charged an entry fee to all that wanted to participate! Catch a special tagged fish on a Saturday in June and you win a prize; maybe a \$100 or maybe a car or truck, or \$10,000 good lord the possibilities were endless. Revenue would flow in, the brooks would have some extra fish, participants would likely catch at least a meal of trout, in short the Cornfield Trout Tournament was born, sponsored by local resident Charles "Chuck" Currier. All monies over and above expenses would go to the Cornish and Plainfield Elementary Schools to be used for athletic programs. Apparently, you can buy what amounts to an insurance policy to cover the odds that a tagged fish will be caught in a time certain period. That must be quite an algorithm to work through. I guess you would solve for X. Despite the math, I wonder if the insurance agent bought a bag of trout food and fed those tagged fish all night long before the release.

The record is not clear as to how Cornish came to be included, perhaps it was just too much to resist, the name Cornfield out of Cornish and Plainfield. More likely, it was that the Blow-me-down Brook flows from Plainfield into Cornish and fish are good swimmers, plus the more the merrier, why not let Cornish in on all this fun. A permit were issued by the State of New Hampshire Fish and Game, flyers were printed up and distributed, all was good or was it. The devil, as we know, lives in the details.

The Cornfield Tournament first hits the Plainfield Selectboard record on April 17th when Chief Gillens reports that he has some concerns about a planned fishing derby. The State issued a permit for the event on that very day with no communication with Plainfield or Cornish. Bloods Brook and Blow-me-down may flow through our parrish but apparently

that isn't sufficient reason for the state to talk to the town's. By May 6th the concern has grown to include both Plainfield and Cornish Selectboard's and the School Board's from each town. The School Board's have their backs up, the previously mentioned advertisement flyers posted around town by the organizer seem to indicate sponsorship by the two districts, yet neither district had been formally contacted about the tournament. The tournament organizer is getting mad, he is just trying to cover expenses and turn over some much needed revenue to the ungrateful towns. Private landowners are threatening to post their lands, farmers are concerned that high value first cut hay is about to be trampled by scores of wader wearing sportsman all hoping to catch one of those tagged trout that will make all their dreams come true. As you can see things are starting to go badly so a Cornfield Summit is planned for May 20th 1991. Lawyers are being called sabers are being rattled. The trout, they are still swimming circles in their concrete hatchery tanks unaware of all this.

May 20th comes, Selectmen are reading prepared statements, Fish and Game brass is in attendance and has brought the department's lawyer, Mr. Currier has brought his lawyer, and both School Districts are in contact with their attorneys. Fish and Game drops the bombshell that the permit for the event was mistakenly issued, but if as the Attorney General of the State of New Hampshire has requested (that's right the Cornfield Trout Tournament has the attention of the highest law enforcement office in our state) both School Districts will sign a letter of consent, the event may go forward. Extra game wardens were promised to keep the peace. These brooks are public waters and can be fished by any licensed angler, entry fee paid or not. Tensions are high, what if a tagged trout is fillet and eaten, think of the shattered dreams.

Now at this point the record shows that 290 entry fees of \$15/sport have been collected and deposited into something called Bank East. So, with ten days until the first cast the revenue pot was \$4,350 less expenses (like trout, flyers, overhead etc) to be split between the two districts. I am no accountant, but I wouldn't add on to that house just yet, the solution to Plainfield's tax problem coming from brook trout and games of chance seemed unlikely. The fees to the attorney's consulted about this thing would likely surpass the gross revenue.

In the end, the consent letters were signed, the fish were released and scattered about. Chief Gillens reported to the Selectmen on Wednesday June 5th that no major problems occurred, nor were there any big winners. Farmers got in good hay, a few anglers took home some trout to eat, a bunch of fish survived to swim for another day and what about our school districts? Well, the record does not show any revenues from the tournament. The Selectmen did decide, after this episode, to begin to require raffle permits for town events that involve games of chance.

In my view the life lessons learned were simple, the need for good communication and perhaps most importantly that the way to fund public programs is with public money not games of chance.

Taxes are high and town services should be looked and carefully. Both Plainfield and Cornish successfully survived the 1990's and continue to this day to be great places to call home and raise families. Things like the Cornfield Trout Tournament are the spice that keeps life interesting, the trick, just don't take it too seriously and don't expect a gimmick will ever replace hard work for consistent results.

So, for now we close those dusty minute books and in September we return to the business of budgets, zoning ordinances and yes taxes! Enjoy the summer and good fishing to all.

Steve

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator-June 2017

By Stephen Halleran

The Great Glassing of Whitaker Road July 1991: Now, to be fair the times were different recycling was something new to us all. The Plainfield community has enjoyed curbside collection of garbage since the closing of the old town dump in 1973. Recycling at this time was mostly done by energetic young people driving old Subaru hatchbacks or squared off Volvos. These folks typically operate with a slightly earthy approach to life. Road Agents from that area were not earthy in the green sense, they were earthy from the get on a big machine and move it the hell out of the way sense. Lots of work to be done each year, no time to play around with garbage, burn it our bury it!

In 1990 the Plainfield Selectmen approved the construction of a recycling shed at the highway garage. The small drop off facility can still be seen at the east end of equipment shed. A dedicated group of volunteers staffed the facility a night or two a week and Saturday mornings. Newspaper, cans, glass, textiles, used oil were all collected. Susan Williams of Center of Town Road fame became our Recycling Coordinator with tasks ranging from scheduling volunteers to marketing the collected materials.

So, suddenly the Subaru crowd was firmly entrenched in what had previously been full sized Chevy and Ford truck only territory, the Highway Garage. Trouble could not be too far away. Now, shed space was limited and grant money flowing for recycling related equipment. Glass bottles are bulky and don't pack well. Enter the grant provided glass breaker. This red bottle eating beast that mounted to the top of a 50 gallon drum could take a full 16oz Budweiser bottle and break (break not crush) in into hundreds of sharp shards that would packed efficiently into the drum below. Storage capacity was massively increased, as was the weight of the drums. No Subaru that I am aware of was hauling those things to market; you need loaders and big trucks for that work, highway men.

Enter into our little drama Art Thompson, Plainfield Road Agent, cut from steel cloth. The only descent cigarette was an unfiltered one and more were better than fewer. Art was at the same time the best of Road Agents and the worst of Road Agents. He could fix or fabricate anything, run a road grader as well as any Pike paid professional, in fact for some time he might have been a Pike paid professional grader operator, but he had little patience for what he deemed foolishness. Blunt honesty with residents was not uncommon and could quickly lead to conflict. Art was hired and quit or was fired by the Selectmen at least three times. He also fired his entire crew one day because one of them hid a stray cat in his desk drawer, which apparently was quite anxious to leave when Art opened that drawer sometime later.

So, back to the summer of 1991 the recycling shed was up and running, glass was being broken and as needed hauled with the other materials to market. At some point Sue Williams placed the fateful call to Art for a glass transport and upon arriving the facility was closed the trucks turned away. It is here that things went bad, terribly bad. Fast forward to five o'clock, the first call from Chief Gordon Gillens to Selectman Jay Waldner came in. Something had happened to Whitaker Road, bike and car tires were going flat at an alarming rate. Broken bottles seemed to be the cause; highway had graded the road earlier that day. Jay Waldner and I arrived at the Route 120 end of Whitaker Road where Chief Gillens had set up a command post. The road was closed; the surface

of Whitaker Road had a magical sparkle caused by the flashing cruiser lights. Bits of green, and clear, and brown glass twinkling across the roadway as far as the eye could see. In its own way it was quite beautiful. Things went down hill quite quickly from that moment on. I will never know what possessed a man as smart as Art to spread all that broken glass over the road way and then grade it into the road bed. I suppose he thought he could dump it out and bury into the road and it would be gone, recycled. It was true some places at the time were crushing glass and using it as deep road base material. Breaking and crushing are very different. At the crushed level glass returns to sand, at the broken level it's a weapon. We bought a lot of tires that summer. July 31st 1991 the Selectmen's minutes indicate that Thomas and Katherine Laflam came to the meeting to discuss the glass recycling "experiment" on Whitaker Road. The LaFlams questioned the size of the aggregate and the safety of motorist and pedestrians using the road way. I don't remember Judy Dupree being so kind when she called me and came over with cans and cans of glass she had collected from in front of her house. I do remember speaking as a 23 year old to the Associated Press which had gotten hold of the story and was anxious to learn about our "experiment."

In the end, Art went down to Whitaker Road with the grader windrowed up the top 6" of the road and hauled it away to some undisclosed location as fill. We re-graveled Whitaker Road, bought a few more tires and life went on. Art stayed on the job a few more years and Sue Williams and her staff continued to change the culture in Plainfield about recycling. Curbside recycling soon followed and 25 years later recycling in Plainfield is now what we do without even thinking about it.

Next time we shall, for now, end our memory lane series with the Plainfield Cornish Trout Tournament also of 1991. This was your chance to catch a stocked trout in the Blow-me-down brook with a special tag in its dorsal fin. Prizes for the lucky anglers. Two towns, a couple hundred participants marauding over private land along the brook, the State Fish and Game Commission what could possibly go wrong!

Stephen Halleran

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator- May 2017

By Stephen Halleran

One of the values of being a municipality is our minutes and the historical record that they provide. As time passes our memories tend to either fail us or bend events to fit our preferences. The minute books, gathering dust in the vault, keep us honest and true. I thought it might be fun to take a look back to Selectmen's minutes from April/May of 1990 and see what the hot button issues of the day were at that time. Steve Taylor told me years ago not to get too full of yourself in this business it's all been done before in one form another. In 1990 I would have been 23 years old with a lot more hair and 7 months of the job. Bruce Baird, Jay Waldner and Judy Belyea were our Selectmen. Art Thompson was the Road Agent and Gordon Gillens the Police Chief.

April 18th, 1990: I reported that "the computer" in the office was taken away and will be returned on Friday with software installed. How did we survive two days without "the computer?"

A new micro film reader was ordered for the office. Its now gathering dust in the attic.

Beavers and their resulting dams in wetlands adjacent to Old Country/Hedgehog Road were causing havoc with the roads. They still are.

Grass roots cable was nearly ready to go operational. Little did we know that this would be the beginning of the end of our social fabric. Even with just 30 something channels (up from 4 via the old antenna) husbands and spouses would never have to talk again.

The Brook Road was starting to delaminate. For those that missed it, this was one of the great road debacles in Plainfield's recent history. Perhaps only out done by the great glassing of Whitaker Road, when for reasons that are still unclear highway spread broken glass bottles all over the road as part of a failed recycling experiment (hint, a glass breaker at the recycling shed is much different than a glass crusher). Its true glass is made from sand, but broken into large pieces it acts more like knives than road base, a story for another day. Back to Brook Road, something called a "pug mill" had been used to create our own farmers mixture of sticky asphalt and stone. Think your own paving plant on the cheap. Well, in a nutshell, all hell broke loose along with a rain storm and dozens and dozens of cars were splattered with a sticky mixture of tar and sand/rock bits. It got so bad that the Selectmen held a car wash at the highway garage. We spent a Saturday cleaning cars, dirty in one door, clean out the back door. Well the next spring, April, the new surface began to fail and essential just came off the roadway in chunks. It was a big deal for many months. Finally, with no choice the Selectmen brought in the Pike pavement reclamation machine and we started over basically.

Health insurance was costing as much as \$3,000 per year for a family plan, less of a plan now costs over \$20,000.

April 25th, 1990: Steve Halleran reported that research showed that Unifirst was a good value for the highway department uniforms. We are now using Unifirst again after leaving for a decade or so over quality and cleaning issues.

The Meriden Town Hall sign was returned by the Cornish Police Department, I was directed to make changes to the sign so that it couldn't be stolen again. I have absolutely no recollection of the incident, but I must have done a good job, because it hasn't been stolen again.

May 2nd 1990: Highway completed the first of what have now been four expansions of the Plainfield elementary school parking lot. At that time town offices were located in the front of the original school building. Those were fun times and the relationship between the town function and the school function has never been closer than during the period 1973-1995. Sharing essentially the same office space necessarily kept a lot of lines of communication open. The town and school interacted on a daily basis.

A detailed discussion about the cost of ambulance coverage occurred. You'd think the ambulance provider would pay the town for the rights to cover it, since the real money is billing your insurance company for the ride to the hospital. Oh no, we pay for the privilege of being billed. Nothing has changed its still a frustration.

The Selectmen were waiting for estimates for repairs to the Houser Lane bridge. Today it's the Camp Road bridge.

I'd say Steve Taylor was pretty much right, same problems just different days. Maybe next month we can relive the glassing of Whitaker Road, last I knew Judy Dupree, who still lives on Whitaker Road, still had the evidence.

Steve Halleran

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator April 2017

By Stephen Halleran

Bridging the divide: Exhale, I am not referring to the library system or the Plainfield Plain/ Meriden Village thing that a few refuse to let go of, but most don't care about anymore. No, I mean literally bridging the divide from one side of Newton brook to the other. Town bridge 177/096 needs work. The state, as part of its every two years inspection program, just awarded it the Red List designation, meaning it has deficiencies that require it be inspected annually. This is our only true "Red listed" bridge.

The Selectboard has directed Road Agent Richard Collins and I to begin the process of repairing/replacing the Camp Road Bridge so called. If you have ever found yourself under the Camp Road Bridge, we don't need to know why, you are aware that the bridge structure consists of seven 36" deep steel I beams that span 30' from abutment to abutment. The steel is massively oversized for that little bridge. John McNamar tells me he remembers those beams coming from a NHDOT project and building the current bridge as part of his work with the highway crew sometime around 1984. Effectively, the bridge structure is a thirty three year old hand me down that has served the town very well. The steel still has a lot of life, but needs to be cleaned and painted. The bridge deck is something like 250 2x6 20' planks nailed on edge, also very strong. However, the deck is showing some wear and has a tendency to move about a little when a vehicle goes over it. Not move like going to fall away, more like enough rattle to get your attention and make you fully awake. The guard rail on the bridge is junk. Broken and needs to be replaced. The abutments, salvageable but they too need some work, the north one in particular has some erosion at its base, a common enough problem for abutments when water rushes up against them during high flows.

Our initial plan was to rehab the bridge. Pull of the deck, clean and paint those massive beams, repair the abutments, build a new wooden deck, freshen the rail and your done. Maybe \$50,000 to \$75,000. The bridge would be closed most of the summer, but there is another way around and people in the neighborhood understand the need for the work.

Not so fast, the divide shall not be bridged that easily. It turns out to properly prepare the work site to protect the brook, clean the seven beams, prime them and repaint is more than \$125,000! The disposal of the sand and lead paint/rust bits from the cleaning alone is more than \$35,000 in hazardous waste. Plan B consisting of removing the deck, cutting out the steel and replacing it with a new craned into place pre-stressed concrete deck begins to sound like a bargain at \$103,000. That buys you the bridge structure and the travelling deck. You still need the abutment work, rails, etc.

Current thinking is that the project will cost something like \$125,000-\$150,000 and can be done with a fraction of the bridge closed time of the rehab project. Our bridge fund has a balance of \$135,000. So money is tight, but we might still bridge that divide. The work does not have to be done in 2017, a bridge can remain on the red list for years and still function, but the message is clear the work needs to be done.

We of course have other bridges that are slowly deteriorating (aren't we all), the much loved Meriden Covered Bridge, sits on steel beams that will, guess what, need paint. So, it would be nice to get the Camp Road project behind us and begin to ramp up for the next.

All this is still in the preliminary stages and remains influx with much more work to be done. What we know is that this is not a bridge to know where and like all the issues we face as a community, together we can reach the other side. Think spring!

Steve

News From the Town Administrator

By Stephen Halleran

This is the time of the year when we begin to check project results with the annual plan to see how we are doing. Like a budget, the plan is a hope, a best guess and things rarely go exactly as planned. In any case, here we go.

Town Office: The window project is now complete. Almost without exception every window sash in the building, large or small has been removed, repaired and returned with new opening and closing systems along with a new exterior storm. The results are that the building has maintained its historical look and is more energy efficient. The entire project over two years cost about \$30,000, with approximately half of that money coming from two Moose Plate grants. The project is great work by our Energy Committee. A special thank you is due to Michael O'Leary who has taken a leadership role in his project acting as the project manager. Michael has spent a lot of time on MTH windows, thank him when you see him.

The Selectmen have signed a contract with Avitar Associates for the 2018 Revaluation project. This update is the statistical update and does not include a measure and list of all properties. Avitar will be visiting a random sample of our properties to insure that our data is accurate. Their goal is to develop an assessing model for Plainfield that will predict market value as of 4/1/18. This new model will be used for five years. In 2023 another update will occur and that update will include a visit to all properties, just like the 2013 effort. We are seeing the real estate market become more active, this should provide sufficient sales data to Avitar as they develop the model.

Police Department: As recommended by our Finance Committee our police department now includes three Ford Interceptor SUV cruisers. The lease purchases on these vehicles all run together so that every four years we will get three new cars. The vehicles we have now will be in service through the end of 2022. For towns the days of the old Ford Crown Victoria are gone. Plainfield's last one is headed to auction in early October.

The Police Department has made pedestrian safety on Bonner Road a top priority this year. We are at times having two officers, one on each end of Bonner Road, monitoring traffic during the start and end of the school day. If you have ever seen our young students walking along the roadway with backpacks that are bigger than they are or riding bikes to school you know first hand how scary it is when you combine a bunch of late moms and dads rushing their students to school, while they are eating breakfast and checking messages. FYI the Police Department will not be issuing warnings for distracted driving on Bonner Road, its an immediate ticket do not pass go!

At the same time the Selectmen have approved the hiring of our regional planning commission to prepare both short term (do right now projects) as well as long term, more capital intensive, approaches for making Bonner Road safer for pedestrians. Sidewalk and speed tables are in play. Once we have the report back it will be shared with the community for further input and discussion.

Highway Department: Thrasher Road received its wearing course of pavement and Methodist Hill received a shim and overlay this summer. In an attempt to address some neighborhood concerns, a 100' section of Harriman Road was also paved (four way intersection at the top of Methodist Hill). The Camp Road bridge abutment work has been permitted by the state's wetland bureau and the funds have been reserved for the actual bridge deck replacement, likely to occur right after school gets out next June. The abutment work is planned for this month. Knowing that we will use the bridge for most of the next year Highway added some new wood to the deck. While the deck is perfectly safe, it's a little unnerving to watch the individual boards move like the keys of a piano when a car goes over it. The new wood should prevent that and make the bridge a whole lot quieter as well. Camp Road bridge is first followed almost immediately by the replacement of the Ladieu Bridge. That bridge is just a deck replacement project and could well be done next year as well.

Finally, the Road Agent and the Selectmen have begun dissecting the results of our Highway Department study report conducted by Municipal Resources Inc. This report is seen as the Selectboard's first action on the Highway Garage study committee's recommendation that the planning for a new public works facility begin now. In a nutshell, the consultant felt that the highway department is well run; the mix of equipment is about right and our facility while weather tight is very much out of date and not enough of a building to considering renovating. A full replacement is recommended. Now to be clear, the existing garage will continue to serve us well for years to come, but it is time to realize that a new facility is in our future and we should begin planning for it. The consultant also felt that we burden the Road Agent with too much responsibility. He cannot be the mechanic, an equipment operator and steer the largest town department. Returning to a model where we have a dedicated mechanic was recommended. He also felt we need to make sure we are not holding onto equipment too long. Finally, Highway's core function is road maintenance, not road reconstruction. Like most town's we ask our highway department to also be our construction department. This saves cash money, but results in lost time on maintenance. A lot here to think about, again not a lot of wholesale changes are immediately planned, but as opportunity presents itself I am sure the Selectboard and Finance Committee will use the report to strengthen the highway department.

Tax Rate: We hope to have the tax rate set in early October. Early indications from the school are that they turned back more unexpended funds than they had projected to be able to return. This is a very good thing. The town's grandlist has grown by about \$3,000,000 dollars, the bigger the town's tax base the broader the shoulders are to share the tax load. The hope is that the 2018 tax rate will look an awful lot like the 2017 rate. We can hope for less, but any year that property taxes don't increase can't be all bad.

So as you can see there is plenty going on. Why not commit to stopping in at one Selectboard meeting this fall or winter and talking to us about your views on the town and what you'd like to see or not see happen. Anyone that walks in can have a few minutes of the board's time, we work for you. That would help us a great deal. The

Board meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesday's of every month. The first meeting of each new quarter is held at the Plainfield Library all other meetings are typically at MTH. Come see us.

Steve Halleran