

TOWN MANAGER – 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

I am pleased to submit my annual report for the Office of Town Manager for the year ending December 31st, 2019. This was a healthy year for the town, with continued growth, capital improvements, an active sustainability effort taking shape, and many personnel changes via retirements.

The year began as it normally does with budget hearings and winter snow in early 2019. This followed with our annual deliberative session at the High School, and the town and school elections in March. Voters approved many articles at the ballot box including a bond for renovating and adding on to our library, which is underway as of this writing. In addition voters approved design funds for the recreation park on Hampton Road. Acquired in the mid-70's, this property serves as a community recreation hub and is in need of updates for 21st century recreation. Potential upgrades including a potential community center on the site would allow Parks/Recreation to relocate from their current outdated building at 32 Court Street. On the same warrant design funds were approved for a project on Salem Street to replace and update old water and sewer lines. This project is underway. The proposed operating budget was supported by a 68.4% favorable vote, and the water and sewer budgets also passed at the ballot.

Activity on current capital projects also continued to progress in 2019, as the Lincoln Street improvement project was completed, the new Wastewater Facility and Main Pump Station went 'live' and began accepting and processing wastewater, streetlights were all changed out for new LED technology, and several improvements were made to town parks and the Healy pool via the town's newly established parks improvement fund. As part of the wastewater plant construction, Newfields Road was closed for several months while new forcemains were installed, along with a new waterline. These improvements will serve the town for decades to come, and the new Wastewater Facility is already paying dividends by discharging effluent well below the standards of the EPA administrative order, bringing the town into compliance.

Drinking water was also a big topic in 2019, as the town continued to work toward TTHM compliance and achieved this in September, 2019. The town continued work on a groundwater and surface water assessment to ascertain next steps in our drinking water program. This will result in looking to expand groundwater sources, an upgrade to our surface water plant, or both. Keeping up with changing regulations is a priority as the state passed new PFAS/PFOA regulations in the recently completed legislative session. The town currently has undetectable levels of PFAS in the public water supply.

The March town ballot also approved two new collective bargaining agreements with the SEIU 1984 and the Firefighters Association. These are both 3 year agreements and will keep both units under contract through 2022. In addition voters approved an important Police and Fire facility and staffing analysis, that is expected to provide a road map for our future public safety services. The study got underway in fall of 2019 by the Center for Public Safety Management with results expected in early 2020.

Regarding personnel, there were many changes in 2019. Several long time employees retired including Police Chief Bill Shupe, Deputy Tax Collector Linda Fecteau, Police Office Manager Liz Thibeau, Animal Control/Parking Officer Neal Jones, Accounting Clerk Helen Perrier, and Assistant Town Clerk Eve Quinn. Captain Stephan Poulin was promoted to Police Chief, and the new Chief reorganized the department so a Deputy Chief and Lieutenant structure replaced the current 2 Captain alignment. Mike Munck was named Deputy Chief, and Steve Bolduc moved into the Lieutenant spot from Sergeant. Norma Ryan was promoted to Police Office Manager, and Colby Krafton replaced Norma as the Administrative Assistant. In July, Pam McElroy joined the Town Manager's Office replacing Town Manager Executive Assistant Sheri Riffle, and Rachel Laughner was hired in August as our new Deputy Tax Collector. The Finance Department hired

Melissa Perusse in May as the new Accounting Specialist. Finally, Jennifer Shupe was hired in the Town Clerk's Office to replace Eve Quinn. Brittany Flower joined the Human Resources Department as a new part-time HR assistant position was approved in the FY19 budget. Also Parks/Recreation promoted Nancy Bugbee to full time as Office Manager. Other promotions included Matt Berube named as Water-Sewer Manager, and Steve Dalton moving into a new Assistant Water/Sewer Manager position that replaced the former Water/Sewer Engineering Tech position. All in all a year of change and new faces for the town, and we welcome them all and congratulate those that moved up. We also thank those who gave the town many years of service and wish them all the best in their retirements and new life endeavors.

Planning and Economic Development continued to be active in 2019. The Epping Road TIF continued to thrive as water and sewer extensions were completed to the King property, the TIF road aka Ray Farmstead Road was completed and accepted as a public way, and the first units went on sale at 116 Epping Road. The TIF doubled in value in 2019, and will only increase further as Unutil broke ground on a brand new headquarters in September on Continental Drive. The Public Works Department was instrumental in seeing the TIF work through with special recognition to Town Engineer Paul Vlasich and Economic Development Director Darren Winham. The Select Board approved changing the name of Gourmet Place to Energy Way, and we look forward to serving as Unutil's headquarters for years to come. New residential development in 2019 included the completion of units at Sterling Hill, 2 Hampton Road, and groundbreaking on new condominiums at the former Brad's Auto site on Main Street.

Property values were a large topic of conversation, as the assessors from MRI conducted an update of the town's values a year early. As a result, values climbed an average of nearly 30% - the largest increase in at least a decade. This climb was due primarily to a hot real estate market, and confirmation of Exeter as a great place to raise a family. As we continue to improve our infrastructure, maintain our natural resources and quality of life, we become ever more attractive for those that wish to move here and enjoy the town.

In October, the town's tax rate was set at \$23.27/1,000 of assessed value, a decrease of \$4.23 per 1,000 under 2018. The state budget settled in September 2019 also restored partial general revenue sharing to the town, resulting in \$158,990 in new revenue to offset the 2019 town share of the tax rate. An important program of SAG (state aid grant) for wastewater projects was also approved which will provide Exeter over \$700,000 annually to offset debt service for the new Wastewater Facility and systems. Our state representatives, including Julie Gilman, Gaby Grossman, Skip Berrien, and Lisa Bunker, and State Senator Jon Morgan, are to be commended for their efforts on the behalf of the town. Their support through the state budget process was key in restoring important aid to Exeter.

Wrapping up 2019, I would like to thank and acknowledge the efforts of our team of department managers, our employees, and our boards and committees. Thank you to the Select Board for your guidance and leadership throughout the year. In a year of transition, there was a lot to be proud of and many accomplishments we can point to as progress for our town. We continue to have success by coming together and strengthening our community.

Respectfully submitted,

Russell Dean
Town Manager