

## **TOWN MANAGER – 2021 ANNUAL REPORT**

Please find enclosed my 17<sup>th</sup> annual report for the Office of Town Manager for the year ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021. The year represented our second year as a community weathering the COVID 19 pandemic. Despite difficult circumstances, the Town moved forward again in 2021.

COVID continued to impact Town operations in 2021. Select Board meetings continued under the Governor's Emergency Order in a virtual space, with meetings using the Zoom platform for not just the Select Board but all Town Boards and Committees. The Town Deliberative Session went on, however special accommodations were made for unmasked and masked participants. A PA system was set up outside the High School, and thanks to some herculean efforts by the school and town IT personnel, the session was allowed to go forward.

Vaccines for COVID 19 began distribution in February at Exeter High School. Exeter Fire personnel provided support to the National Guard's process and vaccines were a welcome sight in view of the seriousness of the pandemic.

The Town Election occurred on March 9<sup>th</sup>, and all warrant articles were passed by the voters. This vote included the 2021 Town Budget, and four bonds: The Salem Street Utilities project, the landfill solar array project, lagoon sludge removal at the Wastewater Facility site, and continued work on Groundwater Development. Voters also approved \$100,000 to conduct an alternatives analysis for public safety options on a new facility. The work will continue into 2022 on this project.

The Select Board and Health Officer replaced the Mask Ordinance enacted in August, 2020 with a Mask Advisory on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Due to the ongoing pandemic and emergence of variants including Omicron, the Board re-enacted the mask regulation in late December for all indoor buildings in Exeter. The latest regulation will run through March of 2022.

Governor Sununu ended the state of emergency on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The Select Board returned to in person meetings on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Human Resources Director Donna Cisewski retired from Town service in June, 2021. We wished Donna the very best in her retirement. As a result of Donna's retirement, the Select Board supported a recommendation to reorganize Human Resources by retitling the position Assistant Town Manager/Human Resources Director. In July, Melissa Roy was appointed to fill this position, and we wish Melissa all the success in her new role with the Town. Up to the point of her appointment to her new role, Melissa was the Assistant Parks/Recreation Director. The reorganization will provide the Town Manager's Office with additional assistance and increase support to boards and committees.

Other notable retirements in 2021 were Jim Mahoney, who retired from Parks/Recreation with 12 years of service, Jason Greene, who retired from the Fire Department with 20 years of

service, Lee Dawson, who retired from the Fire Department with 24 years of service, Carole Mitchell, who retired from the Tax Collections Department with 33 years of service, and Susan Baillargeon, who retired from the Fire Department with 34 years of service.

Planning and Economic Development remained busy in 2021 despite the pandemic. The Epping Road TIF continued to thrive with many units of the new Ray Farm development being completed and sold. A new mobile vending ordinance was approved to regulate the existence of vendors in the downtown area. The downtown had two visible 79-E projects with Pairpoint and IOKA Properties LLC both receiving 79-E approval from the Select Board. Several more projects continued discussion and will carry forward into 2022.

Property values continued to increase in 2021 as homeowners continued to take the time to improve their properties. Low interest rates and high desirability continued, and Exeter remained a hot real estate market, particularly for residential properties. Overall values increased a little over 1% more from the prior year.

In November, the Town's overall tax rate was set at \$24.01/1,000 of assessed value, a decrease of 49 cents per 1,000 over 2020. The Town's share of the overall rate decreased, as the Town's rate came in at \$5.79 per 1,000, a decrease of 12 cents over the prior year, but a reduction in the overall share of the tax burden to 23% of the total amount raised.

As 2021 comes to a close, Exeter has shown its strength in the most difficult of circumstances. I would like to thank all the Department Managers who performed admirably in 2021. I'd like to thank the Select Board for their support during 2021 including outgoing member Daryl Browne. I'd also like to thank my assistant, Pam McElroy, for all of her efforts throughout a most challenging year.

Respectfully submitted,

Russell Dean  
Town Manager