

TOWN MANAGER – 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

I am pleased to submit my annual report for the Office of Town Manager for the year ending December 31st, 2022. This was a healthy year for the Town, with continued growth, capital improvements, an active sustainability effort taking shape, and a very active EXTV covering Town events and meetings. EXTV is a special part of our community that should get more emphasis in 2023.

The year began as it normally does with budget hearings and winter snow in early 2022. 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 several bond issues: rehabilitation and replacement of the Webster Avenue pump station (\$5,700,000), the purchase of the 10 Hampton Road property for Parks/Recreation purposes (\$1,250,000), and design/engineering for the upcoming Westside drive construction project (\$330,715). The proposed operating budget was supported by a 71.9% favorable vote, and the water and sewer budgets also passed at the ballot. Voter approval of our budgets on a regular basis continues to prove there is much voter support for the Town.

Activity on current capital projects also continued to progress in 2022, as the Salem Street Area utility project saw major progress, new sidewalks were installed on Linden Street, work on the Pickpocket Letter of Deficiency continued, and several improvements were made to town parks via the town's newly established parks improvement fund. At the end of 2022, the siphon replacement project across the Squamscott River got underway. These improvements will serve the town for decades to come.

Drinking water was also a big topic in 2022, as the town continued to work on a groundwater exploration program started in 2020. At this time the town has identified key sites within the Town to potentially drill and work toward supplementing our current groundwater sources at the Lary Lane well, Gilman well, and Stadium well. It is expected this work will carry on in 2023 and result in a new large groundwater withdrawal permit in 2024.

The March town ballot also saw three new collective bargaining agreements be approved; with the SEIU 1984 (Public Works), the Exeter Police Association, and the IAFF Local 3491 Firefighters Association. There are 2-3 year agreements (DPW and Exeter Fire) and one four year agreement (Exeter Police). These contracts will run through 2024, 2025 and 2026, respectively. These contracts are coming at a time of significant inflation and a tight labor market, so they are achievements in a difficult labor climate.

Work continued in 2022 on a capital improvement solution for the future of our public safety departments. Consultant Levallee Brunsinger worked closely on facility designs with Police Chief Poulin and Fire Chief Wilking and their command staffs. Dave Sharples, Town Planner, led the efforts from the planning perspective. The result is a new police station and fire substation planned for Town owned land on Continental Drive, and this warrant article will be presented as part of the 2023 Town Meeting.

Town Planner Dave Sharples shepherded a solar array project through the Energy Committee and Select Board. Thanks to Dave's continued efforts in this area the Town can look forward to a solar array being built on Town property at the landfill. This project will be voted on at Town Meeting in 2023, to add funds to an already approved 2021 warrant article.

Regarding personnel, there were many changes in 2022. The Town's new Assistant Town Manager/HR Director, Melissa Roy, took on the duties of her office and completed a key upgrade to the Munis system amongst many other enhancements. The Town saw retirements in three key positions: Deputy Police Chief

Mike Munck retired after 23 years of service, and was replaced by Josh McCain, from the Portsmouth Police Department. Paul Stevens retired from the Exeter Fire Department after 19 years of service. Finally, Jennifer Perry, the Town's longtime Town Engineer and DPW Director since 2007, retired this past year. Jennifer's last year was spent with Exeter after receiving the prestigious APWA Leader of the Year award. Jennifer was a key leader on many Town projects over the years, and has exhibited tremendous leadership for Exeter. In April 2022, the Town welcomed Corey Stevens as our new Finance Director, replacing Doreen Chester who moved on to the New Hampshire Bond Bank. Corey has had a busy several months coming up to speed but has assisted the transition in Finance tremendously resulting in another clean audit for Exeter.

Planning and Economic Development continued to be active in 2022. The Epping Road TIF continued to thrive as Nouria and the Primrose School joined the list of successful TIF economic development projects. New housing units continued to be sold on Ray Farmstead Road, and planning continued for the Gateway at Exeter, which will feature 224 units of housing, with 56 units to be deemed affordable. The TIF continues to be tremendously successful, adding 76 million dollars in incremental value to the Town's tax base since the initial creation back in 2015.

Pam McElroy continued to support the Town Manager's Office in 2022 while fulfilling her duties as Welfare/Human Services Administrator. The Town is fortunate to have someone as capable as Pam in the position which presents daily challenges and an ever increasing caseload.

In November, the town's tax rate was set at \$24.75/1,000 of assessed value, an increase of \$.74 per 1,000 over 2021. The Town's share of the rate increased 17 cents per 1,000 from 5.79 to 5.96. The Town's share of the overall tax levy sits at approximately 23%. Excess fund balance allowed for 1,000,000 in surplus to be applied to lower the tax rate. Key to the tax rate setting effort were Assessor Janet Whitten, our new Deputy Tax Collector Melissa Heitz, and new Finance Director Corey Stevens. They made the process nearly effortless despite two of them being brand new to the process. Janet Whitten was her steady self in the position of Assessor, creating the warrant for the tax office.

November 2022 kicked off a water/sewer rate study. It has been several years since rates were examined and this study will assist in setting our water/sewer rates for the next several years.

Wrapping up 2022, 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. There was a lot to be proud of and many accomplishments we can point to together, as progress for our Town. As our community grows, our infrastructure improves, and it continues to be the great people of Exeter, our friends and neighbors, that make it so much fun to call Exeter home.

Respectfully submitted,

Russell Dean
Town Manager