

TOWN MANAGER

The Town Manager annual report for the year ending December 31, 2024 represents my 20th as Town Manager.

The New Year began with Bill Keegan of Keegan Associates presenting to the Select Board on the state of Exeter's organization and suggested improvements. The Keegan and Associates report represents an important road map for a new approach to management within the organization. As a result of the report, a three person Executive Team consisting of the Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, and Finance Director was formed. This team meets at least weekly and reviews ongoing issues and assignments to keep the day-to-day work on task. In addition, an internal leadership team was formed. This team, meeting every other Tuesday takes on the task of examining issues at a deeper level and identifying roadblocks before they become larger issues. Finally, weekly operational meetings take place each Friday. These virtual meetings are a recap of the week's events and allow departments to report out in a larger group and on a more frequent basis. These changes, endorsed by Keegan and Associates, have changed the way in which the Town functions at the management level.

Early in 2024, the Town was concentrating on the Annual Town Budget and Town Warrant. The Town Operating Budget, Water Budget, and Sewer Budget all passed at the Town vote in March, with each getting close to 70% or more of a favorable vote. Other significant votes included the passage of an article which will provide funding for a new police station/fire substation on Continental Drive. Voters approved passage of this project with an amendment for "net zero" design and construction in the amount of \$17,500,522. As of this writing, the project is well underway and has an OPM (Owner's Project Manager) – CHA, TGAS (Ted Galante Architects) and Eckman Construction on board as the construction team. Internally, Town Planner, Dave Sharples, continues to do a great job overseeing the project with Fire Chief Justin Pizon and Police Chief Stephan Poulin. Activity on the project will continue as 2025 progresses. Other important articles that passed the ballot were School Street Area Improvements – Design/Construction, additional funding for the Webster Avenue Pump Station project, new Surface Water Treatment Plant Design/Engineering, and an appropriation to the Town's ADA Fund. Voters also approved an article providing a funding match for a new Planet Playground, which will match a Land Water Conservation Grant of \$297,500 with the same amount from the Town's unassigned fund balance. This project is expected to be completed in 2025 under the guidance of the Parks and Recreation Department working with the Recreation Advisory Board.

A major challenge came to a close in 2024 and that was the Squamscott River Sewer Siphons project. After voters approved additional funding in 2023 to complete the project, the second pipe was inserted through ledge in Squamscott River after drill holes were made. This project, which accommodates approximately 30% of the Town's sewer flow, is now complete and will serve the Town for years to come.

In late 2024, Swasey Parkway was reopened by the Select Board with the new Swasey turnaround in place. This turnaround will allow vehicular access from the Newfields Road side of the Parkway. The judge's orders are now complete as the Parkway enters its next phase as a discontinued way to the pavilion and open to vehicular access to the North side.

The Town continued to welcome new Public Works Director Steve Cronin in 2024. Steve dived right into the many different issues in Public Works and provided instant leadership to the Department. Steve met bi-weekly with the Assistant Town Manager and myself and proved to be active and well organized on a number of projects including groundwater, the planned roundabout at Pine/Front/Linden Streets, the Webster Avenue Pump Station construction, new septage facility, Epping Road near-term improvements (TIF), Pickpocket Dam, the Swasey turnaround construction, and Westside Drive utility project. All of these projects add value to the Town's infrastructure and are geared toward improving the Town's future.

Planning and Economic Development continued to be active in 2024. The Epping Road TIF District continues to succeed with 8.28 million dollars in revenues booked at year end. Several projects are contemplated for the TIF District before it sunsets and returns any excess revenues to the general fund.

The Town underwent a significant property revaluation in 2024. This resulted in an overall increase of 55% to the Town's tax base. The seacoast real estate market continues to be hot and 2024 showed the strong market in play. Manufactured homes saw an increase in value of 149%, while commercial properties increased 37%. The result of the revaluation was a drop in the overall tax rate of the Town from \$26.78 per 1,000 of assessed value to \$17.79 per 1,000 of assessed value. The new Town tax rate dropped from \$6.23 per 1,000 of assessed value to \$4.18 per 1,000 of assessed value.

In late November 2024, I was offered and accepted a 1-year extension to my current employment contract. I would like to thank the Select Board for their continued support and look forward to another active year in 2025.

I would like to again thank and acknowledge the efforts of our team of Department Managers, including Assistant Town Manager/Human Resources Director Melissa Roy, and Finance Director Corey Stevens, Police Chief Stephan Poulin, Fire Chief Justin Pizon, Public Works Director Stephen Cronin, Town Planner Dave Sharples, Economic Development Director Darren Winham, Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer Doug Eastman, IT Director Andy Swanson, Town Clerk Andie Kohler, Library Director Hope Godino, Parks & Recreation Director Greg Bisson, Senior Executive Assistant Pam McElroy, all of our Town employees, and our volunteer Boards, Committees and Commissions. Exeter continues to be recognized as a prime place to live in the State of New Hampshire, and we're fortunate to have such dedicated employees and volunteers helping to foster that process.

Respectfully submitted,

Russ Dean
Town Manager