

2015 Selectman's Year End Newsletter

Town of Bridgewater, NH

1/13/2016

[Edition 1, Volume 1]

2015 Re-cap

Overview

Demographic Changes

As many may realize, New Hampshire is a "graying state" Likewise, in Bridgewater, our median age is also increasing. The town median age is presently 50.4 years. This is more confirmation in the school age population. For example, in 2003, we had about 150 students (k-12) in the school system (SAU4). By 2015, we have declined to 98 students from kindergarten to the 12th grade. (In 1880, the school population was 89!!). It also appears that we are in a continuing decline. This year, the entry grades of K-3, has 19 students. In the senior grades of 9-12, there

"Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."-- Mark Twain

are currently 36. In addition, we had about 30 neighbors pass on in the last 2.5 years while the age group of 0-5 years recorded only about 3 births over that same period. The School District (SAU4) has also experienced a decline in total student enrollment of about 40% (1550 to 1100 +/-) in the same time span. Their predictions of enrollment trends indicate a leveling of that declining trend. We disagree. We believe the school enrollment will continue to trend downward. Migration into our Town appears to be mostly "empty nesters" These indicators will have some impacts on services needed in the community. We addressed some of this by implementing our ambulance service about 10 years ago which now averages 120 request for services annually. We also support

For more information, click/paste the following link:

<http://www.jbccom.com/2012/04/communities-consequences-4-time-telly-award-winning-film/>

Selectmen's Office



Some Basics:

What are the duties of the Selectmen? (A partial list)

The primary responsibility of the Board of Selectmen is to manage the affairs of the Town in accordance with the policies and laws set forth by the voters of the Town Meeting and by state law.

The Selectmen are the executive, managerial and administrative body that does whatever is necessary to carry out the votes enacted at town meeting.

Manage the prudential (financial) affairs of the town and appoint board and committee members

Regulation of town highways
Licensing
Health regulations
Setting fees
Establish and amend local welfare guidelines.

Manage and regulate use of town property
Adopt and amend town codes and ordinances
Assure that all taxable property is inventoried and appraised

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senior service support groups in the Newfound Areas such as NANA, Newfound Senior Services, and Day Away Program to mention a few.

We have a growing concern relative to SAU4 costs. How can the school budget continue to increase with declining enrollments? The classroom size (Teacher/student ratio) has declined which is good for the students. However, there is a point that this enrollment decline will necessitate some future unpleasant decision making. 75% of a tax bill is involved with educational costs. Given the local job market, coupled with low birth rates, some contraction appears inevitable. We will continue to monitor this development. It is a complex issue.

Infrastructure

Town Buildings.

In the Beginning.... (A rough history)

Prior to the 60's most small New England towns met in personal residences to conduct town business. The Old Meeting House on Bridgewater Hill was used until the early 1900's for Town Meetings and other gatherings. (It was too difficult to get to the Meeting House in the spring mud and other sites were eventually chosen). In the 60's and 70's we transitioned to mostly public buildings. The Grange Hall on RT 3A was used for Town Meetings until the late 80's with one small office for the Selectmen. On the River Road, there was a school house and part of that building was used for the Town Clerk and Town Library.

We built a small building in the 60's to accommodate a highway department and, in the early 70's, a fledging fire department shared the building. In the late 70's we built the current highway building on Dick Brown Road. During that period, the Refuse District was started and we transitioned away from open burning of trash. In the late 80's we constructed the current Town Hall. The School District deeded the River Road School house back to the Town and a Head Start program used that portion of the building for many years. (That program moved and

Selectmen's Office



Who are the Selectmen?

Terence (Terry) Murphy

1975 - Present

Maurice (Skip) Jenness Jr

1986 – Present

Henry (Hank) Woolner

1998 – Present.

NEWS: We recently receive a private grant of \$ 85,000 to replace outdated fire air packs (\$60K) and to replace a heart monitor in the ambulance (25K)

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transitioned to the Whole Village Family Resource in Plymouth). We renovated that building to house the current Library, Town Clerk, Historical Society and Scouts.

In late 90's we created a Special Village District with the Town of Hebron. That Village District comprises the outline of both towns and we built the current school building. That district is a separate political subdivision and acts like a Township. It maintains the building and leases the building to SAU4 for \$ 1.00 per year. (It is amazingly successful and is one of the highest performing K-5 elementary schools in the State!)

The Village District school bond was paid off in 2005 and we recommended to the Town Meeting to upgrade and expand Public Safety. We extended fire, ambulance and police services. (That bond issue was retired last year). We have a call fire department, a full time EMS director and a Police Chief with a number of part-time personnel utilizing that facility and providing improved and affordable services.

In 2000, the Department of Environmental Services brought to our attention that our Solid Waste programs were non-compliant. We upgraded the District in 2004 to its current configuration.

Other Infrastructure:

In the upgrades to public safety, a new fire truck was purchased, an upgraded ladder truck was obtained and a backup fire truck was replaced. (In the 90's we purchased a high capacity reel truck for firefighting). The ambulance vehicle was donated to the department by a private foundation. We are very well equipped in that division. The public safety debt service (fire truck) will be fully amortized this year. The building payoff last year was repurposed by Town Meeting to obtain a new police cruiser, plow truck, sander and new backhoe. That repurposed debt was reduced to a 5 year bond.

Selectmen's Office

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The Town Hall, Public Safety and school buildings were built to allow for future expansion. Those buildings were built to be energy compliant. For example, the Town Hall is zoned multi fueled. Forced hot air in the meeting hall and electric radiant heat in the offices.

All buildings have standby generators and automatic transfer switches for long term outages. Both the safety building and school have large generators to act as an emergency shelter if necessary. The other buildings could be shut down and fall back to the shelters in an extreme event.

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During 2014, we did some major repairs/maintenance to the Town Hall, Public Safety and Highway buildings. The buildings were repainted, trim repaired/replaced and re-shingled as needed. A few years earlier we re-roofed the Town Clerks office and re-sided that building. Prior to that, we lifted the Bridgewater Meeting house and put a new foundation under the structure and did major repairs to that building. The concrete had a façade of granite applied above the grade line to give the appearance of an old granite foundation.

It is far less expensive to maintain your infrastructure than to face the cost of expensive repairs or replacement. It is well known that many school districts and towns across the State have a challenge as they built very expensive buildings and then fail to adequately fund the maintenance budget.

More Info – Finance, Department News etc. Next
newsletter

Best Wishes for the New Year

Terry, Skip and Hank

Selectmen's Office



Assessments:

During 2016, the town will be required to “re-val” all properties. This must be done every five years as put forth by the State Constitution and laws.

Often we hear “My bank appraised my value less than the town assessment.”

Assessed valuation is used to determine the value of a residence for tax purposes and takes comparable local home sales and inspections into consideration. It is the price placed on a home by the municipality to calculate property taxes.

Bank appraisals for loan purposes usually take into account other properties outside the municipality and other factors.

We use replacement cost of the structure and land values of existing sales in the town to fairly distribute property taxes. Bank appraisals and tax assessments rarely match.