

Town Of Bridgewater Newsletter

Bridgewater Select Board

2020

We have many new full and part-time residents in Town. In addition, the last newsletter was a few years ago. So, here it goes:

Demographics: The makeup of the town continues to evolve. The median age of the Town has trended upward and is about 59 years young! School age population continues to decline. This demographic shift continues to evolve and the next U.S. census will give us a better understanding of this change. For current info see: <https://www.nhes.nh.gov/elmi/products/cp/profiles-htm/bridgewater.htm> NH is the 3rd oldest state in the Nation. Our ambulance/public safety is kept quite busy because of that fact. They average about 200 calls for service annually. The longer term impact for NH communities will, most likely, be upward pressure on labor costs.

Town Finances: As a Select Board, we often hear people's concerns about taxes. The Town finances are in good shape and we continue to be a low tax rate town. Historically, Bridgewater has always had strong finances. Occasionally we get some surprises, but we have learned to smooth out those "bumps in the road". Long term debt is very low (< \$50,000 due 2021). We have a modest surplus and our infrastructure is in good shape. As we pointed out with the insert accompanying the 2019 second half tax bill, 70% of your tax bill is for School and County. They continue to be "the tail that wags the dog". Very few residents attend the school or county budget hearings and the school district manipulates the default budget which gives the voters little choice when voting. How can the school budget continue to rise when student enrollment is in serious decline over the last 10 years? (Approximately 1550 in 2010 vs 1150 in 2019)

Because of significant increases in the Newfound School District and Grafton County tax rates in 2019, we set the 2019 town tax rate portion artificially low to benefit the taxpayer. This year, the town rate portion will return to the original rate. The net effect was to spread the School and County rate increase over two years and less shock to the taxpayer from the increase in school and county costs.

Reassessment in 2020: The Town is required to keep property assessments between 90 to 110 percent of market value. Because of the robust real estate market over the past few years, our property values have dropped to about 82% of market value. For example, a house assessed at \$ 350,000 sold at \$413,000. When you have different categories of “arm length” sales transactions (riverfront, waterfront, residential and commercial etc.), selling much higher than our assessments, it is time to reassess. The ratio created by the difference between those two values is known as the "equalization rate." In the above example, it is 82%

Moreover, we are required by state statute to review assessments every five years to keep assessments in line with guidelines.

From our experience, 1/3 of **property tax bills** will increase, 1/3 will remain stable and 1/3 will decline. We expect the tax rate to decline in 2020. It is too early to determine the tax rate but it is expected to decline. You will be mailed more information about this matter during the year. You will be able to meet with the assessor for information about the proposed changes to the property valuation.

Please note, this assessing process occurs because of **market factors** impacting the real estate market not due to local budgeting. Prior reassessments have been realistically benign. ***We are recommending you escrow or put aside additional funds to avoid a surprise next December.*** Obviously, we will work hard to mitigate any impact.

Questions often heard:

“Is there a view or waterfront tax?”

No, all assessments are based on representative sales of property in the Town. The building replacement value is determined by companies that give us market data that has been adjusted to our area in NH. That building value is adjusted upward or downward depending on the most recent site inspection of the house. For example, a building in the same category but has hardwood floors, renovated baths, kitchen with granite countertops will usually have a higher value than a similar home that has had little maintenance or upgrades since its construction. Other factors like depreciation and functional obsolescence (A partial list) help determine valuation. Land values also have differences such as size of lot, unusual topographical features that make the lot less marketable. We have been very diligent and fortunate to have very talented assistance in assessing matters.

How much will the tax rate decline? That is difficult to project. It will likely be in the mid to low \$8 dollar range. Remember, it's an estimate only.

The Town is reassessing all properties at the “peak” of the market so that they can raise more taxes. True or False?

False. The Town is reassessing all properties at this time because A) it has to be done every five years and B) the fairness of the assessments was starting to shift (partly due to market changes). The State of NH requires all towns to “re-certify” their assessments every 5 years and to make changes on a more regular basis if different classes of property are not being assessed at the same level.

Does the future certification process mean an increase in assessment and or taxes?

No. If real estate sales values were to decline, your assessment would go down in the next assessment cycle. This review process does not mean automatic increases. Assessment values are reviewed every five years. If the assessments are changing rapidly in one strata of housing, that strata may be changed between the certification periods. It depends on the market sales of like properties in town. Taxes, and the ensuing tax bill, are mostly based on what different political subdivisions adopt as budgets. If Grafton County adopts a 10% increase in spending; if school budgets increase; then taxes will increase all things being equal. The Town rate(s) you control at Town Meeting. As long as NH uses the property tax as its main source of raising funds, especially for education, the outlook for property taxes is difficult for most cities and towns.

If spending remains constant and the tax base (the sum of all land and building values in the Town) of the Town increase, your tax bill goes down. If spending increase beyond the normal expansion of the tax base, the tax bill increases.

Real Estate Assessed Value vs. Fair Market Value (Appraised Value) or

“My bank appraisal was less than the tax assessment, why?”

Assessed value is a valuation placed on a property by a public tax assessor for purposes of taxation. Fair Market Value, on the other hand, is the agreed upon price between a willing and informed buyer and seller under usual and ordinary circumstances. It is not unusual to have a difference. In essence, appraised values (i.e. bank) are nothing more than opinions of value. They should, however, be based on previous sales data that a reasonable person would conclude is substantially similar.

Tax assessors are required to determine the value of properties in their jurisdictions (i.e. town). They are not required to adjust the assessed value of those properties to reflect market value that may include sales data from similar sales in other towns to allow banks and lenders to determine fair market value. Appraisals done by lenders rarely



match the property assessment.

Environment, Climate, and the Town. Over the years, the community and various town Boards have addressed this issue. If you log onto www.townofbridgewater-nh.com and click on the link to the 2018 town report and scroll to pages 6-7, you will find a comprehensive list of zoning and ordinances items that helps control growth while minimizing environmental impact. This year, we replaced about 500 fixtures in town buildings with LED bulbs. This lowers our energy usage from a potential 16,000 watts of energy to 6,500. It greatly reduces our bulb and ballast maintenance costs as well; Lowers our energy footprint, and that has positive impacts on the environment. We are in the process at the BHVD school building of phasing out florescent bulbs with LEDs. This will continue over the next few years until the building is 100% LED. We recycle the existing good bulbs as replacements in other parts of the building until that area is upgraded. Our highway department is arranging for certifying improved uses of salt on the roads. Our Refuse District has addressed complex issues on landfill closure, ground water analysis, recycling and air quality monitoring to mention a few.

There will be a warrant article (referendum) proposed by members of the community on carbon fees and dividend return relative to climate change. We support that initiative relative to the federal level.

Administrative Offices: The Selectboard has a new Administrative Assistant. Julie Converse joined the staff last April. She has a background in accounting and human resource management and was formerly the director of finance for one of the local insurance pools in the State of NH. Julie also has a background in real estate management. Our former assistant, who worked with us for 15 years, unfortunately moved on to new endeavors. We thank her for her commitment and wish her great success.

We have new public office hours and work days. Public hours are: Wed - 9 AM to Noon; Thurs. Noon to 3 PM. Selectmen office hours: Thursday 7:30 PM to 9 PM (No change)

The Select Board's office hours is for the public to meet with the Board to assist the public in answering zoning issues, obtain building permits, timbering, complaints, concerns, forms, planning, tax issues etc. One board member is in the office most mornings as well.

Offices and Personnel: One of our strengths has been the longevity of those who work to keep Bridgewater a nice place to live. Often many believe it's narrowly focused on a few individuals. We are very dependent on the team of individuals to operate town affairs. We employ 5 full-time positions and the remainder are part-time or volunteers. Boards like Planning and Zoning are volunteer. The Town Clerk, Tax Collector and Treasurer are paid part-time. The Fire Department is a paid call department. EMS has one full time and a number of part-time and call positions. Police has one full time and one part-time officer. All police are required to be certified as an EMT. Highway has three full time positions.

The complexity in all departments has substantially grown over the years. The knowledge base that our associates have developed and their dedication to tasks is expansive and challenging to replace. To quote a notable football coach "...just do your job..." To do that job takes a lot of training and experience. Attending conferences, learning new skills, laws, technology and the like is, in our opinion, very beneficial to the Town. We try to build an environment that fosters that objective. The Board has been

documenting and building a constancy plan for the past two years which will continue into the future. When all is said and done, Bridgewater’s team does a great job! Here is a partial list of those who assist in the Towns efforts. We have about 35 full and part-time individuals as paid employees. Solid Waste has 2 full time employees. 50 years ago, the town had 3 full time employees! The following list are those who have been on the team for greater than five years. (NB. If we forgot someone or are not entirely accurate on the times, we apologize).

Employee	Position	Years of Service
TOWN OF BRIDGEWATER		
Murphy, Terence M	Selectman	43
Atwood, Donald	Fire/EMS Chief	39
Jenness, Jr, Maurice	Selectman	34
Linde, Ron	Fire	30
Vestal, Kathy A	Tax Collector	24
Woolner, Henry	Selectman	22
Lyford, Catherine	Deputy Town Clerk	20
Gickas, James	Building Inspector	20
Kenny, Colleen	Town Clerk	16.5
Capsalis, Michael	Moderator/Planning Board	14
Bucklin, William	Highway worker	13.25
Cate, Arnold	Road Agent	12.25
Hill, George	Police Chief	11.75
Fischer, Linda	Fire/EMS	11.25
Merrill, Virginia S	Fire/EMS	11
Fogarty, Jacob	EMS Director	10.5
Potter, Jeremy R	Fire	9.5
Sellers, Donna L	Fire/EMS	8.25
Moore, Thomas J	Fire	8
Hemphill, Helen	Librarian	7.75
Petraszewski, Margaret B	Treasurer	7
Atwood, Bethany M	Fire/EMS	6.5
Stark, Denise	Planning/ ZBA Secretary	5
DeCormier, Cameron	Fire	5
HEBRON-BRIDGEWATER REFUSE DISTRICT		
Murphy, Kieran	Manager HBRD	11.75
Kenny, Hunter	Associate	10.75

We also want to recognize the many volunteers on various boards that makes Bridgewater a nice place to live! Thanks

Public Safety: Fire and EMS. Over the years, we replaced aging air packs in the fire department a cardiac monitor – defibrillator for the EMS division and retired the bond for our newest fire truck. (Original cost - \$ 310,000!) We added an all-terrain track vehicle that can access difficult, snowy or muddy terrain. The upgrade to the facilities coupled with additional staffing and training over the last two decades has been impressive. There are significant training and educational requirements for all divisions currently to be a fire fighter, EMT or police officer. Annually, the ambulance averages about 200 calls for service. The fire department has a great response record for a small department. Many of our staff from highway, police and EMT's are crossed trained to assist in emergencies.

A few years ago, we added Power-LOAD system to the ambulance that transfers weight from the patient and stretcher to the system, instead of stressing firefighter/paramedics backs. This also enhances our ability to draw and retain women to the service.

Our biggest needs in Fire and EMS is personnel. If you have an interest in this area, give the department a call. We reimburse training and certification expense.

Police: In 2017, we replaced the police cruiser with a Ford Police Interceptor Utility Cruiser (4x4). This upgrade included new communications and other accessories necessary for protection. In addition, important changes by the Police Chief improved random patrol scheduling especially on the weekends. This year, we added a part-time officer to the staff to improve coverage. His background was as a Police Chief for a neighboring town and he is EMT qualified. He replaces Angela Lyford, who retired from police duties.

Given the seasonal nature of a recreational community coupled with the expanse of the town, it is impossible to be all places at once. (Even with mutual aid) Securing your property with alarms and locks for recreational equipment is a very helpful deterrent. New, inexpensive, wireless burglar devices using cell towers access can improve protecting your assets and personal safety.

Highway: This department and personnel continues to excel in maintaining our roads and drainage systems that keep the roads in place. In many cases, they work in poor weather servicing callouts for downed trees and heavy rain. We face the following in a recent article: “Rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns are likely to increase the intensity of both floods and droughts. Average annual precipitation in the Northeast increased 10 percent from 1895 to 2011, and precipitation from extremely heavy storms has increased 70 percent since 1958. During the next century, average annual precipitation and the frequency of heavy downpours are likely to keep rising. Average precipitation is likely to increase during winter and spring, but not change significantly during summer and fall. Rising temperatures will melt snow earlier in spring and increase evaporation, and thereby dry the soil during summer and fall. So flooding is likely to be worse during winter and spring, and droughts worse during summer and fall. Torrential downpours in neighboring communities in 2019, causing millions of dollars of damage...” US EPA The highway has already experienced this change.

This year we are requesting a new truck for this department. It replaces an 11 year old Ford F550 at a cost of \$ 75,000. That includes a new plow assembly and sander. The old truck will be moved into light duty.

Over the next few years, the Select Board objective is to focus on road matters.

Infrastructure:

Major Completed Infrastructure Upgrades (Partial Listing)

Highway building expansion and retrofit * Salt Shed *

Upgraded vehicles in highway and police and fire*

Improved road maintenance; Better surfaces Re-surfaced Carriage Rd. i *

Improved road drainage *

New public safety building*; Improved training for police and fire.

New Ambulance and Rescue Vehicle ++

New EMT's; improved safety services; improved communication capabilities*

New SCBA tanks, backup attack truck, UTV vehicle, defibrillator ++

Backup generators for all buildings – Emergency preparedness improvements *

Establishment of an emergency plan. *

Community shelter at Bridgewater – Hebron School *.

Improved winter maintenance. *

New solid waste plan and facility. *

Improved assessments methods to meet state requirements and save taxpayers *

Vinyl sided Community Building on River Rd. Improved Office (Town Clerk) *

High Speed Internet access to 80% of the Town.

**** Paid off - no long term debt or in existing budget ++ Donated.***

We plan to request funding for a new roof on the Public Safety building (\$ 75,000), upgrades to the computer network of routers, firewall and servers (\$ 15,000) and town highway truck and accessories (\$75,000) (Those computer are about 10 years old and need to be replaced to improve security and reliability. The total bond will be \$165,000 and short term.

Bridgewater-Hebron Village District. (School)

B-HVD is a special-purpose village district formed by Bridgewater and Hebron in 1998. In 1999, the Village District built the current school building located in Bridgewater. It leases the building to the Newfound Area School District for \$1 per year. The Village District Board is responsible for the care and upkeep of the building and grounds. Its focus is to provide a safe, nurturing and stimulating atmosphere for learning. The School District is responsible for the educational content. The Village District charter restricts direct involvement in educational matters. We, effectively, property manage the facility

Congratulations to our children, families, teachers, and staff for their continued success in academic assessments. Our students did an outstanding job in the English language arts/literacy and mathematics summative tests. This kind of performance comes from a well-run school (thank you Principal Dana Andrews), high standards, community involvement, and an engaging environment where students look forward to each day.

The attached greenhouse continues to be a lucrative learning tool, integrating various aspects of the school's curriculum, as well as connecting the school and community.

Bridgewater and Hebron currently enrolls approximately 50 of 150 students in the school from grades K-5. The remainder come mostly from Alexandria and Bristol with a few from other towns in the SAU4 District. The building structure allows for expanded use if the need arises. It could accommodate k-6 or k-8 if so desired by the overall school district (SAU4). SAU4 has decided that all elementary schools continue with the k-5 model. With declining enrollments in the area and State, any change appears unlikely.

Some years ago, B-HVD set up a maintenance reserve to buffer any impacts on the tax rates of each town. Unanticipated major capital repairs can be expensive and disruptive. We are currently in the process of lamp/bulb replacement to LED in the building. It is a phased in process. In 2017, we replaced the boilers and roof shingles and have a few years before that small bond is retired. We greatly improve safety with security cameras, entry bollards and electronic entry systems. The School District also improved other safety protocols within the building.

HB Refuse District. (Solid Waste)

Recycling rates approached 44% this year due, in part, to a large transport of wood chips. That item is processed construction and demolition material that are converted to chips used for landfill cover. That reduces disposal costs from \$100 to \$20/ton. We actively recycle paper, cardboard, electronics, steel, aluminum, waste oil, vegetable oil etc. We also recycle plastics but a large portion of plastics is sent to an offsite landfill as there is no market for many plastics. Landfill items includes Styrofoam, drywall, single use plastic bags, furniture etc. By removing plastics and other materials from the waste stream, the remainder consists of mostly kitchen and house low-grade paper. We are cleanly incinerating the remainder. The gases are scrubbed and treated for air quality. This avoids methane release and is void of carbon monoxide. CO2 release at 7% is also low. Effectively the air quality impact is far below the standards mostly because of the elimination of the plastics in the waste stream. Wood stoves and furnaces produce far more pollutants than this approach.

One of the factors that affects costs and air quality is transportation. We had 40 transports to landfills this year. 50 years ago, there were about 270 sites in NH. The

remaining landfill sites are far away. Their locations are in Berlin, Bethlehem and Rochester NH. The transport cost far exceeds the tipping/dumping cost. Diesel engine, even with pollution control emit greenhouse gases. We ship about 7 tons per trip in an open top container. (Compacted by backhoe!). If we compact a similar size container to 16 tons, we would cut our transport costs significantly. Transport costs are expected to rise significantly over the next 3 years. We are researching the purchase of a trash compactor in the near future to offset those costs.

Solid waste management is complex, It is highly regulated and has become a multidisciplinary problem involving economic and technical aspects, normative constraint (i.e.,” pollution is bad, recycling is good”) about recycling and sustainable development issues The closing of landfills and NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) coupled with other importing countries rejecting other exporting countries waste (for good reason) has driven various recycling and incineration processes. It also makes the process problematic because with few material markets, coupled with highly regulated industry, there are few outlets and prices for recycled products decline. Single stream recycling (Which we rejected years ago) has proven to be an economic bust, which further complicates the industry.

Solid waste management is a high priority issue for everyone. Increasing solid waste generation rates, disposal cost, environmental, and health concern, limited landfill space, legislative changes, political climate, and social attitudes have significant impacts on waste management efforts. We are no exception. One help would be the elimination/reduction of single use plastic bags. Life would go on if paper bags were reintroduced. US plastics generated in 1960 – 390,000 tons. 2018 – 26,850,000 tons. Percent recycled = <10%

Nonetheless, we have completed the closing of the old ash landfill, closed an old C&D landfill, and created a groundwater management plan, a solid waste plan, various monitoring plans and various mandatory reporting systems. This is in addition to the processing of incoming material. Most of this work was done in-house with minimal engineering support. In closing, the staff appreciates your efforts in separating your materials and the support you give to environmental change.