

TOWN HALL MONTHLY: January

The 2026 budget has been the most important item on recent Select Board agendas.

As we wrote last month the Town budget is similar to yours. Insurances and utility costs are all somewhat higher. Services such as ambulance and fire also. Historically the Town has honored employees by applying the federal COLA (cost of living) adjustment to wages. On the plus side, Town incomes from the Meals and Rooms Distribution, the Highway Block Grant and Transfer Station fees have all increased.

The most difficult and expensive part of the budget is road construction. As everyone who drives knows we are still dealing with the three major projects resulting from flooding: replacing the Forest Road Bridge, and reconstructing Thayer and Crane Brook Roads. Of the three, Thayer Brook is the closest to completion with a FEMA approved plan and cost estimate. Although it still faces wetlands permitting it will be budgeted for in 2026. The Bridge and Crane Brook Road remain in engineering for 2026. Just a note about Crane Brook: the wildly expensive preliminary plan viewed by Townspeople in November is under intense scrutiny by FEMA. And just a reminder: Derry Hill Road is under contract for reconstruction in 2026 with funds voted at last year's Town Meeting.

The other Town road project cited in the Planning Board's Capital Improvement Plan for 2026 is Cold Pond Road. Last year drainage work was voted for at Town Meeting and completed. In 2026 voters will be asked if they approve finishing the reconstruction by applying a surface overlay to preserve our previous investment. Three smaller projects slated for 2026 are culvert work on Crescent Lake Road, grinding Forest Road and repairs to the Grout Hill Bridge. Those last two will be funded with 2025 funds encumbered for use next year.

As of this writing the Select Board has two more meetings in which to finalize their recommended budget before it needs to be submitted to the Budget Committee for review. The Committee meets weekly on Wednesdays through January. The budget belongs to all of us. Meeting times and dates are posted on bulletin boards and the website. All are welcome.

Winter has set in early. Maybe that means spring will be early too. Happy New Year, Kathi