

## TOWN HALL MONTHLY: February

Work on the 2026 budget continued through January. The Budget Committee began its weekly meetings January 7 by reviewing the Selectmen's proposed operating budget.

Under revenues it was noted that funds for the reconstruction of Derry Hill Road are being held by the State and the project is under contract for 2026. Other revenues are fairly close to the previous year. In addition \$100,000 from the Town's Fund Balance is slated to be applied to the operating budget to reduce it just over \$200,000 from last year's. You may remember Fund Balance consists of money that accrues from FEMA reimbursements and other unplanned revenues over the year.

Under expenses replacement of outdated computers for the Town Clerk and Tax Collector was noted along with increases in the Town's Liability and Workman's Comp insurances and dispatch service for Acworth Volunteer Fire and Rescue. Revaluation is down, having just completed a reval last year, and legal expenses are down. Highway Department spending is projected to be within current rates of inflation and Solid Waste spending reflects increases in both the cost of disposal and our volume of waste which has increased since the pandemic.

At their January 14 meeting the Budget Committee reviewed the Selectmen's proposed warrant articles. Two of the articles come from the Planning Board's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for 2026. The first calls for replacement of the 2018 Dodge truck which has incurred over \$20,000 in needed repairs. Cost of the replacement will be spread over 5 years. The 2026 payment will be paid from the Equipment Capital Reserve Fund with no new money required. The balance will be paid within the operating budget, replacing the expense of the Loader which has been paid off.

The second article recommended by the CIP calls for finishing Cold Pond Road with a paved shim coat. You may remember two years ago this work was postponed because of more pressing flood related work. Last year the first piece of the project, drainage installation, was completed. The CIP estimate for the paving is \$500,000. The article under review calls for applying \$200,000 from Fund Balance to reduce the tax dollars needed to \$300,000. It is important to protect the Town's previous investment there.

There will also be an article asking to set aside \$350,000 for the Town's share of reconstruction of the Forest Road Bridge. This is our match to the State's \$1,400,000 portion of this project and will come from Fund Balance with no new tax impact. By setting aside the funds now the Town will be positioned to put the project out to bid late next year.

Last month we wrote that the flood work on Thayer Brook Road looked close. In the interest of keeping a tax rate that is within the rate of inflation, that work will be postponed to 2027. We can't have everything all at once. In addition we are working with FEMA on lower cost options for Crane Brook Road. The budget process is difficult. We are a small community and can only afford what we can afford. Thanks to all of you who have worked on presenting the best possible use of our precious funds.

See you soon, Kathi