

## TOWN HALL MONTHLY: February

This year there is more to do than usual before Town Meeting. The Town Meeting warrant will include articles on whether to borrow additional flood repair money, whether to reclassify some of our small roads, whether to add to the Zoning Ordinance, and on the year's budget. Each of these areas involves public hearings and considerable discussion.

The hearing to consider a second flood repair loan will be held February 6. Since July, 2021, the Town has spent approximately three million dollars on repairs. Of that, two million came from our first flood loan which was voted on in November of 2021. Additional money came from our operating and capital budgets and from Fund Balance which is the reserve the Department of Revenue requires towns to have to cover the period between tax bills and for emergencies. About a third of our completed repair work has been submitted to FEMA for reimbursement. The supporting data for the remaining two thirds is still being fact checked for submitting for reimbursement. No reimbursement has been received to date. The Town is depending on the FEMA reimbursement to repay the loan principal.

The remaining large repair projects have been estimated at close to ten million dollars. These include finish paving on Charlestown Road, drainage and paving on Derry Hill Road, replacing the Forest Road bridge/culvert, drainage and paving on Forest Road, and finish drainage and paving on Crane Brook Road. There are also smaller projects to be considered such as the Nye Road culvert. It will take several years to complete all that work and it is likely there would need to be a new loan each year/construction season. This is because FEMA is strictly a reimbursement program. The Town has to pay for repairs before it can be reimbursed. If the Town chooses not to continue to finance repairs, the work would have to be done much more slowly with money built into each year's budget. The hearing February 6 is an opportunity to air ideas on this issue.

The Selectmen's Small Roads Committee has been working since last spring to understand whether the Town would save money by stopping maintenance on some of our smallest, less traveled roads. The results of the Committee's work is scheduled for hearing January 28. Committee documents, including a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), are posted on our website or can be obtained from the Town office. Several roads have been recommended for reclassification from Class 5 (Town maintained) to Class 6 (not Town maintained) and the intention is to have each of those roads presented as a separate warrant article at Town Meeting.

At their December meeting the Planning Board held a public hearing for discussion about proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinance. Two topics were discussed. First, was proposed language to be added to Article III, Section D which covers signs that would disallow internally lit signs and recommend permitting for certain signs. Second, was proposed language which would add new Section M to Article III that would allow tiny houses and yurts as dwellings after receiving a building permit. To support that addition, a definition of tiny houses and yurts would also be added to Article XVI. Following their discussion, the Board voted to recommend the proposed amendments be included on the written ballot which will be voted on Town Meeting day.

The Budget Committee has been meeting weekly. Their public hearing for the proposed 2023 budget will be held February 8. As of this writing the Committee is leaning toward reducing Capital Reserve Fund deposits as a means to lower expenses which are up about 2%. This will be covered in more detail during the hearing.

If you need information on any of these topics, please contact our office. Thank you, Kathi