TOWN HALL MONTHLY: December

From now to the end of the year planning for 2027 is foremost on our minds.

Since October 19 every Select Board agenda has included review of emerging 2027 budget figures. By our December 7 meeting a complete draft of the Board's recommended operating budget is expected. On the positive side, so far, we are seeing decreases in Elections, Planning, Liability and employment insurances, Highway Maintenance and General expenses, and Solid Waste costs. Fire protection and Ambulance service have remained level. We have small increases in Library, Town Offices and assessing expenses.

In November the Select Board met with State Police to review options for increasing our coverage. This comes in response to Townspeople's requests for more attention to speeding in our densely populated areas and more availability generally. Based on our meeting, this would involve a modest increase in our Police/Contract Services budget line.

In December the Select Board will receive the Capital Improvement Plan update from the Planning Board. This will let us know what road projects need to be prioritized. In previous years large projects have been addressed individually in articles on the Town Meeting warrant so that voters are able to see exactly where the bulk of our money is being spent. We believe we will be ready to seek funding for Thayer Brook Road with hopes of completing that flood repair in 2027. We voted funding for the Forest Road Bridge replacement last year which should allow completion of that flood repair in 2027.

We will need to begin making provision for the replacement of the Beryl Mountain Bridge within the next 10 years. In recent communications the State has let us know that bridge is now on the State's Red List of bridges requiring attention. Based on an inspection this fall our first task will be repairs which will stopgap further deterioration while we organize project funding, design and permitting. This is a big project for the Town. With little steps we'll get there.

Most of you will be receiving the fall tax bill. The Town rate came in 4 cents lower than what we estimated at Town Meeting last year. Good for us. The County is also slightly lower. The rates for both State and Local Education are slightly higher. When the State assigns tax rates it also provides towns' fund balance. Ours is strong which could allow us to apply some fund balance to projects which come onto the warrant in 2027 as we did in 2026.

On November 3 we held the mid-term election. Over 500 Townspeople cast their ballots; over 75% of our voter checklist. We can be proud of this. Recent elections have seen an increase in the use of absentee ballots. By State law absentee ballot envelopes are required to be opened during polling hours. The voter names have to be checked on two voter lists. Ballots are then placed in the ballot box by the Moderator. Although our poll workers try to complete the opening during low traffic times, it can still be an inconvenience to in-person voters who may have to wait. Going forward the Town will post a time for absentee voting so we can all plan around that.

It's almost Thanksgiving. Thank you for being there, Kathi