

TOWN HALL MONTHLY: January

On December 16 the Department of Revenue (DRA) let us know the 2024 tax rate for the printing of fall property tax bills. As you may have heard and we have explained, this comes over a month later than in the past and was due to delays on the part of the School District submitting their financials to DRA. The Town rate came in just where Selectmen, the Budget Committee and the voters estimated last winter at \$8.88, a 46 cent increase over 2023 which reflected the numerous ongoing flood repair projects. The County rate increase of 49 cents reflects the ongoing remodeling of the County Home. The largest increase of \$1 is in the Local Education rate.

Tax bills will likely be in the mail right around the holidays and have a due date in January.

In the final weeks of each year Town office time is dedicated to preparing the next year's budget. This is a lot of work as each of the Town departments and boards, along with our outside vendors, needs to be reminded, sometimes multiple times, to submit their requests. In recent years, the placement of income and expenses that relate to flood repairs and their reimbursements have to be checked with the Department of Revenue. Vendor contracts which unduly exceed the previous year need to be cost checked against other vendor options. All of this takes time.

As of this writing Selectmen have prepared a budget which includes engineering of ongoing flood projects including the Forest Road Bridge, Crane Brook Road, Thayer Brook Road and several smaller roads along with reconstruction work on Cold Pond, Crane Brook and Forest Roads. If those expenses and Capital Reserve Funds deposits are approved by the voters the 2025 tax rate is estimated to be less than the 2024 rate or about \$8.50. This is possible because the new budget uses funds reimbursed to the Town by FEMA for repairs already done and also because the value of the Town as a whole has increased.

Selectmen hope to finalize their budget at their December 30 meeting. Then the budget is passed to the Budget Committee for their review up until the budget public hearing in mid-February. Dates of Budget Committee meetings will be posted on Town bulletin boards and the website.

At their December Meeting the Planning Board will be developing a Vision Statement for the 2025 update of the Master Plan and reviewing a preliminary draft of the complete update. The Board's goal is to bring the finished update to the Town Meeting in March.

All meetings are posted on Town bulletin boards and our website. If you have questions, call our office, Charlotte can help you.

With so much going on in the world, I am grateful to be here with you. Happy New Year,
Kathi