

Report of the Town Administrator

The new year started with some cold and stormy weather, including a blizzard the Saturday before our Deliberative Sessions, and an ice storm the day before. We had escaped some of this through the early winter months last November and December. Covid was still a concern but pressures and cases were easing after the holiday season.



Our Saturday February 5th combined Town and School Deliberative Sessions were again a great success. Voter turnout was low (55 School and

31 Town) but the cold and sunny day was productive and efficient with FCTV setup and takedown, and all the necessary meeting processes done once as opposed to multiple times. No changes were made to the Town's Warrant and it was moved forward to March 8th voting.

Special note was made at Deliberative Session of the Select Board designation of the 2021 Town Report Appreciation to Michael Rydeen, our Town Moderator, who has held the position for 16 years. Michael does a wonderful job with meetings and our election processes.

The pandemic is wearing on all of us. Patience, clear heads and keeping up with the most current information has helped us maintain Town Services throughout the past two years. We were able to return to a much more normal handling of routine Town events in 2022.



March voting held at Ellis School included readiness to keep the public safe with distancing and cleaning measures to ensure a safe voting environment. Voter turnout was 803 and we continued to use PPE, cleaning supplies and safety equipment from the State of NH for our polling location.

We thank voters for passage of the operating budget and appreciate your thought and consideration of a variety of Warrant Articles. This shows a thorough review of the topic matters involved. Funding for Capital Reserve Articles (Fire Truck, Bridge and Museum) passed; along with Mosquito Control. These reserve funds put the Town in a better position to fund long-term capital needs and create more of a balanced tax rate impact.

Roger Barham was re-elected to the Select Board and there were very few changes in Town Offices in the March election process. We do thank Dennis Buteau for his years of service as a

Checklist Supervisor. Dennis has stayed on as an election worker and his years of knowledge helped with this busy election year. At year end, Governor Chris Sununu named NH's election workers as "people of the year." Very fitting for the hundreds of people in NH who annually help (most for little to no pay) ensure that our election processes are fair and open to all.

On Friday March 25th the encumbered work of reroofing the Old Meetinghouse roof was completed. This had not been done in more than 30 years and was overdue. We now have replaced the roof on all of our Town buildings within the past 10 or so years.

The Highway Department during that same week reconstructed the aged wall within the Sandown Road right-of-way, near the Victoria Farm Road intersection. Both of these projects were completed with money encumbered from excess revenue/unused appropriations from 2021.

We took delivery of the new backhoe on May 16th. This was also purchased with residual

budget funds from 2021. Our former one was used and purchased in 2004 for \$45,000. We got a trade-in value near the same amount and had many good years of use of it.



On May 19th we held a Boston Post Cane Presentation as part of the Select Board's meeting. The 2022 recipient was Jerlene Jalbert, a Fremont native who is 92 years young. Many members of her large family were able to join us, and she was full of

energy and stories.

We began planning early on to have our Memorial Day Event in person after a two year hiatus due to Covid. It was wonderful to refocus on many of the programs which make small-town living so enjoyable.

Our annual Memorial Day event was held on a beautiful day outside in memory of our war dead, followed by tours of the



Meetinghouse and a cookout at the Fire Rescue station hosted by our public safety personnel. This event annually is a chance for the community to come together and honor our military past and present. This year's event was marked by the recent loss of longtime participant Richard "Dick" Burleigh. Dick has been a fixture at the Fremont Memorial Day Parade for more than 50 years. He was presented with an honorary award in 2016 noting his many years of faithful service. He was a Fremont son, and is dearly missed.

We recruited in the spring and were able to welcome new full-time maintenance employee Aaron Chinn in June. This is a first-time position for Fremont and we have been pleased with the additional work we have been able to accomplish. We are still recruiting for a part-time supervisor's position as we are looking for a very specific skillset to be able to oversee the maintenance of our many buildings and grounds with less day to day interaction of myself and our office staff.

The September Primary had voter turnout of 1,137 ballots cast and the November General Election was especially busy with 2,417 ballots cast. We thank our Election Officials for their amazing work during this very busy year!

We bid a fond farewell to Police Sergeant Jason Larochelle who retired in October. We held an Open House and made note of Jay's accomplishments in 21 years of service to Fremont. We were lucky to hire a replacement several weeks ahead of this retirement. Officer Tien Le was already trained, coming to us from the NH State Police. He was able to work with seasoned officers during his field training and the overlap made the transition easier on the schedule. We also welcomed new part-time officer Joe Mucci this year, coming to us following a highly skilled 20+ year career at the Manchester Police Department.

We slightly overspent the planned \$420,000 in paving and road upgrade funding within the Highway Department. This was due to the reconstruction work on Whittier Drive which needed more culvert and renovation work than originally estimated. The Road Agent has committed to annually improving approximately two miles of roadway so that we can keep up with our greater than 40 miles of Town roads.

The real estate market has slowed as interest rates have risen this year. We continue to see property turnover but sale prices are not as high as a year ago. Work began on the new Open Space Developments Lantern Lane and Bassett Lane late in 2022. The sales prices are still up enough that our equalization ratio decreased from 76.5% to 66.4% in early 2023 when it was just released.

The Town's contracted assessors from MRI continue to be in the field weekly doing quarterly reviews and general pickups of improvements and changes to properties. We continue to include the maintenance and hosting costs in the operating budget so this data is available 24/7 on the internet. You can access the Town's assessing data from the Town website and you can always obtain a copy of your property assessment card from our office. Anyone who has

questions or concerns about their value can contact the Select Board's Office. Abatements for 2022 are due no later than 7:00 pm on Tuesday March 1, 2023 when the Town Hall closes.

We said good-bye to other Town employees and volunteers this year and wish them well in their various new endeavors. This includes Patricia deBeer who did not renew her position on the Conservation Commission after many years of serving. Pat has been an amazing researcher and grant writer for the Commission, securing a lot of money over the years toward conservation projects. We welcomed Anne Beliveau and Jack Carson to the Conservation Commission.

Brian McGinn resigned from the Budget Committee in January. Several candidates stepped up to fill the vacancy, which was filled by Emily Phillips in April after a Committee vote. Danielle Gill filled the vacancy left by Deb Caputo's resignation from the Parks & Recreation Commission. Jeanne and Mike Nygren did not run again for Cemetery Trustees, after serving several years in these positions. Frank Chase retired from his part-time position with the Highway Department and part-time Police Officer Kevin Kneeland left on Military Deployment.

Fifteen-year veteran Lieutenant John Linville retired from the Fremont Fire Rescue Department late in 2022. We have not yet been able to celebrate his service with him and his family, but we thank him for his dedication to this important position. Only in recent years has this been a paid part-time position, and there is a lot of training required to keep up with changes in public safety. We thank everyone for their years of service.

Our wonderful Garden Club worked their magic around Town once again. From spring through holiday decorations, they keep Fremont looking sharp. They are a dedicated group that will take on any garden project and do it with a smile and the community spirit that Fremont is so well-known for. Thank you all for your time and endless energy!

The Town also continued to work with the FAA throughout the year on field improvements at Memorial Park. Our maintenance staff installed bleachers that were purchased but had not yet been constructed, and we did treatments to improve field conditions. Members of the FAA revamped the Babe Ruth Field to a 60/70 foot baseline to allow for more use by the teams currently active in Fremont. They are movers and shakers when it comes to youth activities, keeping our kids engaged in so many great outdoor activities!

Coordinator Bill Millios and his team of FCTV operators including Greg and Ian Fraize, Jose Rivera Hernandez and Todd O'Malley continued to live broadcast a variety of community events and our public meetings. Meetings are also livestreamed on Vimeo (when held in the Basement Meeting



room); and later available on Vimeo if held in other locations. This has kept the community engaged and been a huge expansion of the public outreach these great folks are capable of. We thank them for all their efforts!

In July we held a Public Hearing on a \$50,000 grant received from the state of NH which made purchase of the 2022 cruiser package possible. In 2022 we ordered the two replacement cruisers, and at the time of this writing, nearly a year later, we are still waiting for them. We have seen additional costs in maintenance and repairs. The new cars are a different body style which meant that much of the equipment cannot be transferred. These increases did not become known to us until after the January 2022 Public Budget Hearing. We were able to make the project financially feasible with the grant. Traditionally we have purchased two cruisers on a rotation every three years, and cycle out the oldest units after six years. The Police Department operating budget supports the annual \$25,000 lease payment, but due to the increase in costs of all of the equipment, it wasn't going to fund the 2022 lease package. Chief Twiss believes that in future years we will have to rethink this practice. The older cars (now a full year beyond the normal retirement) are still in service/use every day and costing more to maintain.

In late Fall, we received the second half of our allocated ARPA funds. We held a second Public Hearing for acceptance of these funds, again totaling \$246,544.12. We continue to work on the projects this money will fund, and a report of committed funds to date appears elsewhere in the Town Report.

We spent the fall months meeting with Department Heads and the Budget Committee discussing budgets for 2023. These meetings are a good way to learn more about the budget process and details. We try to plan them on the alternative Wednesday nights from the Planning Board as the basement meeting room is the most efficient room to broadcast from and all meetings held there can be live broadcast. FCTV is able to live broadcast meetings from both the basement and first floors of the Town Hall, utilizing Channels 22 (primary) and 13, so when we are "double booked" this is an option as well as the rebroadcast on FCTV. All meetings are also rebroadcast on a schedule, and available on Vimeo.

The 2022 budget was utilized as planned, with some underexpenditures in Government Buildings and Personnel Administration due to the matrix of staff hired and how benefits were utilized. The 2023 budget has planned for the exact current census. Town employees received 2% raises and we started to make some improvements in some of the wages which have been exceedingly low. We are attacking this a few positions at a time. We are thankful for dedicated and long-term staff that helps bring continuity to Town Services.

Thank you to all of our Public Safety Officials for all they do every day to keep Fremont safe and secure. All of our employees work hard for you every day, and we sincerely appreciate all of their efforts. We also appreciate the contracted vendors who handle the Town's winter maintenance operations. This is a thankless job and includes many long hours in the worst weather conditions. Thank you to the townspeople for your patience and support!

We thank everyone who gives freely of their time to volunteer service in Fremont. Our dedicated employees, and all of the Town's many talented volunteers are invaluable to the day-to-day function of Town Government. We could not do it without you! If you have some time and the desire to be involved in a role within the community, please come forward. There are unfilled positions on the Planning Board, Zoning Board (alternates) and the Conservation Commission. We have an immediate need to fill the Planning Board vacancy as we are still short a full Board member. Please feel free to contact me to discuss your background and experiences so that you might find something which fits your interest.

Community service is one of the most rewarding things you will ever do. There are so many opportunities to get involved in Fremont. Participate in the annual meetings or find a Committee, Board or special project/event that interests you. Come out and see what is going on! You can watch more meetings and events on FCTV Channels 13 and 22 and the bulletin board and the Town Website are also full of information for residents.

While Town services are all fully open, you can still feel free to call us or email the Department you need and we will get you the services or information you seek if you are unable to come in person. We continue to use mail, email, the drop box and other creative means to get things done.

The Select Board meets weekly to address the Town's business, at 6:30 pm on Thursday evenings in the basement meeting room at the Town Hall. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or for general information at 603 895 2226 x 301 or by email at hcarlson@fremont.nh.gov.

Respectfully submitted,

Heidi Carlson
Town Administrator

"Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in." ~ Author Unknown



Veteran's
Open
House

11 November 2022

Photos courtesy
of
Bill Millios and
Heidi Carlson