

## Report of the Town Administrator

I am honored to be writing my 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to the residents of Fremont. I have spent much time in recent weeks in thought of where we have been over the past 30 years and the progress is stunning. There were 2,500 people here 30 years ago. We have seen dozens of new roads and nearly 2,500 more residents arrive. We have constructed a new Public Safety Building, a Public Library, renovated ballfields and gone from hiring our first full-time police officer in 1995 to having six (and we are searching for the seventh). We have for the first time a proposal in the operating budget to make the Library Director position full-time and hire a Finance Director. Barbara Bassett worked about 10 hours a week in a one room building with no bathroom, which has since been converted into an amazing Museum overflowing with Fremont artifacts. We have only one road in Town that is unpaved, and plans in 2024 include upgrading that to a reclaimed asphalt product for the first time.



Looking back at 2023, we had a relatively quiet January and February save for a frigid, 20 below zero day for our 15<sup>th</sup> annual Deliberative Session on February 4<sup>th</sup>! We had a good day, with about 44 registered voters and other officials at both meetings, held the same day. Only one change was made to the Town's ballot.



Special note was made at the 2023 Deliberate Session to our 2022 Annual Town Report Appreciation recipients Eric Abney and John Hannelley. Both have made significant contributions to the Fremont Public Library over the past two decades.

Additionally we acknowledged the retirement of Leon Holmes Sr after 65 years spent working with and for the Fremont Highway Department. Leon has also participated in countless other community roles including Selectman, Study Committee member and 55 years of service to the Fremont Fire Department. He was not able to be with us at the meeting due to health issues, but his son and our current Road Agent Leon Holmes Jr, told several colorful tales of years past.

The annual audit was completed during the week of President's Day with no significant findings. Every year we learn more about the processes and how we can do things better. We also see continued requirements for our financial reporting data. We are pleased to report that we completed some new policy adoptions that had previously been on the follow-up list. This includes IT Disaster Recovery, and we plan to have an additional Cybersecurity Response Plan in

place prior to the 2023 fieldwork scheduled for February 2024. We also completed for the first time the required OPEB statement. This is required by GASB 45 (which requires public agencies to account for OPEB as liabilities to be reported on our financial statements). This relates to post-employment benefits.



Fire Lieutenant John Linville retired and was honored in February 2023 for his many years of service to the Fire Department.

The big weather event was the blizzard on voting day, March 14<sup>th</sup>. Due to the forecasted high winds and heavy snow, a decision was made to move voting from Ellis School to the Safety Complex, where there is emergency generator backup.

This decision was made after several meetings between public safety and election officials and was a significant undertaking. We sincerely appreciate the efforts of all the staff and volunteers who helped to make this happen, and a huge thank you to voters who came out on the snowy day to vote. The State of NH has made updates to allow for absentee balloting on the Monday prior to elections for weather events, and we saw many people take advantage of this. Voting is a monumental undertaking that the Town and its Election Officials take very seriously. We appreciate all the efforts involved in this important work including those of voters.

We thank voters for passage of the Town's operating budget, and appreciate your thoughtful consideration of a variety of Warrant Articles, showing a thorough review of the topic matters involved. Funding for Capital Reserve Articles (Bridge and Highway Equipment) passed; along with Mosquito Control. The savings in Capital Reserve and Expendable Trust Funds put the Town in a better position to fund long-term capital needs, saving annually to create more of a balanced tax rate impact.

Gene Cordes was re-elected to the Select Board and there were a few other changes in Town Offices during the March election process. We had two new people (Nancy Murray and Brenda Beauchain) elected to the Budget Committee after Emily Phillips completed a one year term (to fill a 2022 resignation). We had a couple of new appointments to various boards and committees including Kalup Veneman to the ZBA for a full three year term after completing Dennis Howland's term at the very end of 2022; and Ashley Irwin joined the Planning Board.

Thank you to all who step up and partake in the many boards, committees, study committees, and events that the Town is responsible for in any given year. People give up their time and energy for the common good, and literally no other reason. We still have openings if you think community service might fit in your life!

In March we took delivery of two new police cruisers that had also been “on order” for over a year. This means that two older cars were on primary line for patrol a year longer than anticipated. You may note in several of our maintenance budget lines that they are higher than they have been. We are still seeing supply chain delays and increases in costs. Municipal-specific equipment and vehicles (especially police and fire) simply cost more than regular equipment and vehicles. We got a grant for equipment from the State which allowed us to fund the increase in the cost of the newer body style cruisers and needed equipment.

The Highway Department completed major reconstruction work to Whittier Drive, which was multi-year in scope. This road was constructed in phases when originally built, beginning in the very early 1990’s. In addition, a section of Sandown Road from four corners to the Sandown line, was reconstructed and overlaid. Crews also replaced the deck on the Sandown Road



Bridge at Main Street. Some will remember the Town’s reconstruction of that bridge in 1997-98. We anticipated these improvements to last 20 years. Highway crews also keep up with the day to day work of caring for 43 miles of roadway (potholes, street signs, roadside mowing, tree removal, drainage, snow removal and more).

In April we took delivery of two new (2022) police cruisers which had been on order for more than 18 months. The fitup of these was made possible with voter funding as well and a NH Covid Equipment Grant of \$50,000.

We began planning early on to have our Memorial Day Event in person. We were blessed with a perfect late spring day and had one of the biggest crowds in years. The annual event honors 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. We have been trying to catch up on recognizing many Fremonters over the years who have made



this event so special. The 2023 tribute was posthumously awarded to the family of Darrell E Turner. Darrell was a US Navy Veteran (13 Jan 1970-11 Dec 1973). Darrell assisted Lloyd Metevier for years in organizing the parade and was for decades an active member of the Fremont Fire Department. We appreciate the efforts of so many to make these events happen.



On Memorial Day weekend we bid a fond farewell to Betty Rand with a huge memorial “coffee and treats” reception at Ellis School. Betty was a fixture at Ellis School for decades, and a very special part of my life. She and her late husband Dick and their family have been my dear friends for many years. She had many roles in Town but mostly was a beloved friend. We still talk about all the things Dick used to do around town, and miss them both dearly. Elsewhere in the Town Report Matthew Thomas wrote a special tribute to Mildred Emerson Frye, who was also laid to rest on Memorial Day weekend at Village Cemetery.

The 2023 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. Town employees received 5% raises and we started to make some improvements in wages which have been traditionally low. We are attacking this a few positions at a time to try and balance the effect on taxpayers. We are very cognizant of the effects that our services have on taxpayers, and want to provide value for your tax dollar, while also allowing our staff to feel that their service is appreciated and of value. We are thankful for many dedicated and long-term employees who help bring continuity to Town Services.

The real estate market has slowed slightly as interest rates have risen again. We continue to see property turnover and sales prices are about as high as they have ever been. Work began on the new Open Space Developments at Liberty Lantern Lane and Bassett Lane late in 2022 and moved swiftly throughout 2023. The sales prices are still up enough that the 2023 equalization ratio remains low at 64.5% just released in January of 2024.

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 feel that the quarterly review process is a more economical way to keep our records up to date, and that in the five year life cycle between revaluations, it costs less and keeps more continuously updated data. We continue to include the maintenance and hosting costs in the operating budget so the Town’s assessing data is available 24/7 on the internet. 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 2024 are due no later than 12 noon on Friday March 1, 2024 when the Town Hall closes.



We said good-bye to other Town employees this year and wish them well in their various new endeavors. This includes Police Officers Bob McConn, Chris Sanders, Tien Le and Joe Wyner. The Police Department continues to recruit for one full-time vacancy, and was pleased to promote Kurtis Boissonneault to the vacant Lieutenant position. Kurtis has been with us in various full and part-time roles for more than 10 years. We welcomed new full-time officers Nick Patterson and Mike Perrault; and part-time officer Richard Crouse returned as well.





The Town lost a native Fremonter when Charles Kimball passed away on July 12<sup>th</sup>. Charles was an active member of the Fremont Fire Department for more than 50 years, a US Navy Veteran and a member of the Budget Committee for a cumulative 20 years, many of them as Chair. His colorful stories will be told for many years to come. I was honored to be with his Navy and FFRD comrades as part of the Memorial held at Village Cemetery on July 29.

We suffered another significant loss when Planning Board Member Tim Lavelle passed away suddenly in late July. Tim brought his background as a surveyor to the Board, an invaluable resource. We miss him, and will miss the assistance he provided to the Town over many years with various projects needing that type of expertise.

Our wonderful Garden Club worked their magic around Town once again. From spring through to 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!

We celebrated the accomplishments throughout the year of several Fire Rescue members who attained initial certification training or upgraded their level of training. We do these as part of Select Board meetings so the community can see it's staff and volunteers and to acknowledge the hard work and time commitment. New members Abby Eaton, Joshua Pierga and Carole Viator were welcomed in 2023 to the Fire Rescue Department.



As the State of NH converted the former "TEMSIS" reporting system to NH ESR, Captain Vincent O'Connor spent untold hours with data and creating reports that the Department and Town can use to evaluate their services, man/woman hours contributed and a wide range of other data



points. Seth Wood keeps up the Department Facebook page to spread the word of the Departments efforts. Both the Police and Fire Rescue Departments continue to see an increase in call volume as our population continues to grow.

The Town continued to work with the FAA leadership throughout the year on

field improvements at Memorial Park. Our maintenance staff worked on new bleachers that were purchased but had not yet been constructed, and we did treatments to improve field conditions. The Town is very aware of the impact that our playing fields and the FAA have on hundreds of Fremont youth. This is an important part of the community's role, and we value the partnerships we have with the FAA and the Ellis School and District Officials. The FAA offers a tremendous resource to our youth, and they provide thousands of hours of volunteer time to those efforts as well as to helping with field project work.

Coordinator Bill Millios and his team of FCTV Operators including Greg and Ian Fraize, and Todd O'Malley live broadcast a variety of community events and all of our public meetings. Operator Jose Rivera-Hernandez stepped down from the Committee as an operator late this summer due to his full-time work obligations. We thank them all for their service, bringing you a wide variety of Town and School meetings and events. The educational channel was changed by Comcast this year (the second channel dedicated to Fremont) from the former number 13 to Channel 8. This generally includes educational meetings and events (Ellis event or School Board / SAU meetings) and is a secondary channel for use in providing broadcast information.

Bill also orchestrated the advancement of the broadcasts to include a hi-def channel this year. This was a significant coordination between our control room and Comcast, requiring several visits and stages to the process. Bill has been relentless in his efforts (aided by others on the FCTV Committee and the operators) to bring more and improved broadcasting to Fremont homes. He is meticulous about their work to ensure clear and professional broadcasts are on channels. The hi-def channel 1073 is a mirror of Channel 22 broadcasting, and your view of it

depends on whether you have an analog or hi-def cable box. If you do not yet have hi-def viewing, you can visit a Comcast/Xfinity store or call 1 800 XFINITY to discuss options.



Mary Wheaton-Pinder announced her retirement in the summer and a Retirement Open House was held July 31 on the outdoor patio at Fremont Pizzeria. Mary began working with me part-time in the Selectmen's Office in 2003. She moved over to the Police Department in 2005 and became the full-time PD

Administrative Assistant in 2006. She was a big part of the Town's 250<sup>th</sup> Celebration and orchestrated the Miss Fremont Pageant. She served the Town for 20 years and her leaving was an emotional time as I've worked with her all of those years, developing true friendship. We wish Mary and her family well in her beautiful Maine retirement. We miss her many contributions to the Town.

We were fortunate to hire Sue Komenda to fill the PD AA position, and she got a couple of weeks in transition to work with Mary. Sue has been a great addition to our staff.



We took delivery of the new highway truck (which had also been on order for over a year) in September. We thank voters for supporting this purchase. We will have a lease payment for three more years. We said farewell to PJ Clark in the Highway Department as he went to pursue another career opportunity. Late in the year we hired Leonard Nichols to replace him.

Fall months were spent with Department Heads and the Budget Committee discussing budgets for 2024. These meetings are a good way to learn more about the budget process and details. On Wednesdays evenings (generally 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) from September through January, the Budget Committee meets in the basement meeting room at the Town Hall and is rebroadcast on FCTV and Vimeo. We present additional information at these meetings to include in-person sessions with the major Town Departments to present their needs and offer additional insight into what it takes to run the various departments. As Department Heads, we want to be accessible, and have a great deal of information to offer about what our staff and volunteers do, and we want to answer your questions. Please reach out if you have particular questions about the process or need additional information.

We have usually just received the tax rate when we begin budgeting which is a good reminder of where we are. The total tax rate increased by \$0.40 in September of 2023 to \$23.59. The breakdown and other details can be found elsewhere in this Town Report, but we are all alert to the changes in the tax rate and what we need to do to balance the Town's needs against what residents can afford. We saw the total assessed valuation increase approximately \$7.3 million dollars and this helps to offset the increases. Continued development adds to that number annually.



Another Fremont native left us this fall when long-time retired Road Agent Guerwood Holmes died in October. Guerwood served in a variety of roles over many years, including Building Inspector and Police Officer. He will likely be most clearly remembered for his work with the Highway



Department. He worked for years before being elected Road Agent for the first time, and he continued with some part-time and contracted snow plowing even after he retired. He was the Road Agent for 24 years and was the moving force behind the Town finally constructing a



highway maintenance building at the site on Danville Road. Guerwood and I had a particular kinship from the day I came to work here, though it did not come without controversy at times. His humor, caring, and colorful personality are greatly missed.

Many times over the years I have considered trying to put together a “coffee” session or some other informal way for residents to ask questions. I know for some, it is intimidating to speak up at public meetings and ask questions. I have an open-door policy and am happy to try and meet with people as often as I can, but if residents think it would be of interest to hold sessions where information is presented on different facets of Town Government (ie: how we set the tax rate, how we plan and budget or construct Warrant Articles, and similar topics), I would like to hear from you.

As many of you know, I try very hard to see that residents get the information they need to access town services, understand their tax bill or property valuation, have sufficient information to vote on budgets and Warrant Articles annually, as well as a wide variety of choices about municipal matters. Navigating Town services may seem overwhelming, and we want to help you in any way we can. Please reach out to me if you have questions.



Also in the Fall, the Select Board renegotiated a contract with Waste Management for collection of our MSW and recycling for the next five years. The trash contract is a big ticket budget item and we continue to see an increase in the number of new residential occupancies, which will continue to affect the cost. Waste Management came to the Town in February looking for an increase (out of cycle) based on their increasing costs,

changes in the market, and labor/equipment shortages. The Board did not feel taxpayers could support it, and was pleased to reach an agreement at year end that was not a significant increase for 2024, and included a recycling toter to be delivered to each household in 2024. The contract still calls for a percentage increase annually, a fuel adjustment, and is adjusted by the number of new Occupancy Certificates issued by the Building Department. We also continued to see fluctuation in the value (cost) of recyclables.

In December we held two separate Public Hearings to accept excess DOT Highway Block Grant money from the State of NH totalling \$58,516.64 for Highway and Bridge work. We plan to use these funds for improvements planned to Martin Road and the Martin Road Bridge to offset taxpayer expense of this extensive work. The Martin Road Bridge work should finally come to

fruition in 2024. Many of you will recognize that we have been working on this for the past 10 years. We were sidetracked by the last-minute closure of the Sandown Road Bridge Overflow by NH DOT in 2019, but have continued to pick away at the necessary work to get Martin Road completed. This bridge has for years also been on the State's "red list" and is due for NH Bridge Aid Funding in the form of 80% reimbursement. At the time of this writing, we are in line for approximately \$130,000 in reimbursement of our engineering costs over the past 10 years. The work is being bid in February of 2024 with construction planned for the "low flow" of the 2024 construction season.

The project will result in a short-term closure of Martin Road at such time as the precast box culvert is installed. We are right now in the midst of searching for a construction engineer to perform field inspections during the project. The NH DOT has changed their rules considerably since the last time we built a NH DOT Bridge Aid project and we are adjusting to the new rules and guidelines. This has added significant time to the project approval process and we are working diligently to get this completed within FY 2024.



In late December we took delivery of the new EMS truck that was ordered early in 2023. This was fully funded with ARPA grant money. It is a significant upgrade from the stock Chevy Suburban which was retrofit for our EMS gear and supplies. This is a custom vehicle with significantly more space and a better layout and utilization of gear. Members are working out how to mount everything and the truck is expected to be in service by the end of February 2024.

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 townspeople for your patience and support! A special thank you to Jeanne Nygren and Kathy Clement for their work in the Board's Office with me, especially at the busiest times of the year!

I must say, as I do every year, how thankful we are to 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 Parks & Recreation Commission, Planning Board, Zoning Board (alternates) and the Conservation Commission. Please feel free to contact me, a Board Chair or member, to discuss your background and

experiences so that you might find something which fits your interest. Come out to a meeting, or watch one on rebroadcast! We also have short-term commitments like Bulky Day, Memorial Day event planning or Veteran's Day event planning.

I firmly believe that local government community service is one of the most rewarding things you will ever do. I began my "career" in local government at age 13 as a parks and recreation volunteer, and as soon as I turned 18 and could register to vote, ran for office as a Trustee of Trust Funds. I also believe that this type of grassroots democracy is the purest form of government and am honored and humbled to be part of it. Thank you also to our residents and voters for your support and your participation. It is important to the process.

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. Our meetings are live broadcast, and minutes for most boards are posted to the Town's website once approved, and all are available in our office for review. 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](mailto:hcarlson@fremont.nh.gov).

Thank you for making Fremont the special NH community it is!

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

Photos courtesy of Michelle Gallant, Heidi Carlson, Mary Wheaton-Pinder, Jared Butler, Bailey Nasser and Mary Jo Holmes