

## Report of the Town Administrator

Early in January on a seasonable day, the rear shed at the Town Hall was re-roofed. This was long overdue, and part of the 2020 budget proposal.



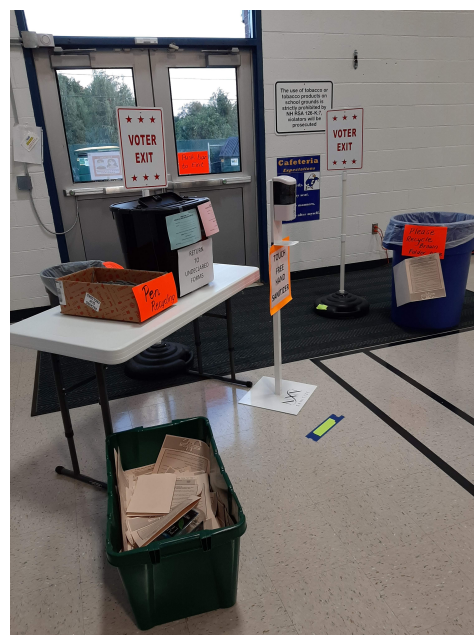
Amidst the early waves of panic regarding the Coronavirus, we began the year with a Fremont Police Department Awards Ceremony on January 30<sup>th</sup> as part of a regularly scheduled Selectmen's meeting. We saw several years of service awards, acknowledgement of honorable and lifesaving service, and Officer of

the Year. It was a small event, but attended by all of our staff including administration and Animal Control.

We held our first Saturday, combined, Town/School Deliberative Session with great success. Turnout was low, but the day was productive and efficient with FCTV setup and takedown, and all the necessary election processes done once versus multiple times. Only one change was made to the Town's Warrant with a reduction in the operating budget as we would not be able to hold a Summer Camp.

Special note was made at Deliberative Session of the Selectmen's presentation to Jack Downing (made previously at his home) as the 2019 Town Report Appreciation recipient. A photo is in the Selectmen's Report.

The February 11, 2020 Presidential Primary had a large voter turnout with a total of 1,666 voters casting ballots. From there, we undertook a lot of prep to begin readiness for September and November which we knew were likely to be much higher turnout. The September Primary had 1,136 ballots cast. Primaries are complex in terms of party registration and "returning to undeclared". We received PPE, cleaning supplies and safety equipment from the State of NH for our polling location.



We had 932 voters cast ballots on March 10<sup>th</sup> for Town and School Elections. We thank voters for passage of the operating budget, and appreciate your thought and consideration of a variety of articles, showing a thorough review of the topic matters involved. The Chester Road Phase II Warrant Article passed resulting in completion of that work this summer. Capital Reserve Funding for the Fire Truck and Highway Equipment also passed; along with Mosquito Control. We are behind in our funding of Capital Reserve Articles but will continue to work toward presentation of them for voter consideration. 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.

Gene Cordes ran successfully for re-election to the Board of Selectmen in March, so there were no changes to the makeup of the Board. Several people stepped down or did not seek reappointment in March. This included Nicole Cloutier, Jon Benson and Rita Mudawar from the Parks & Recreation Commission. Cindy Grasso also stepped down from her position on the Food Pantry board. We thank you all for your many years of service!

As soon as we drew a breath following elections and all the budget work, the world changed drastically with the spread of the pandemic to the United States and New Hampshire. We learned and lived by the new terms of 2020: Covid, masks, social distancing and Zoom, just to name a few. I don't remember a crazier year. Looking back at 27 years of writing this report, this one is hard to beat. We remember 2001 and other years, for they changed the face of our world, but in a completely different way than the virus. Some days we think we will never be the same, but as we begin 2021, now more than a year from the virus discovery in Wuhan China in December 2019, there is some light at the end of the tunnel. It is slow, but vaccines are being distributed as quickly as possible, bringing us renewed hope as we look toward another spring.

Town Buildings closed to the public in late March 2020 and are open by appointment, though we all go above and beyond to get people the services they need. With our limited staff, we are trying hard to stay healthy and keep you healthy. One person getting sick will shut down any one of our buildings and all the services that go with it. We know that this time has not been easy for anyone, and we sincerely appreciate your patience and understanding. Please call us or email the Department you need and we will get you the services you need. We are using the mail, drop box, and other creative means to get things done! We answer the phone all the time we are in the Selectmen's Office to help assist any possible.

Also last March, we learned our Fire Chief Rich Butler had been diagnosed with Leukemia. This began immense changes for him and his family; and a change for our Fire Rescue Family. All of them, the Butler Bunch, and our Fire Rescue Department, rose to the challenge with amazing spirit and courage. Deputies Nichols and Zukas took over the day to day operations of the Department and our Officers and Members rose to the task. Coupled with the immediate and fast-paced challenges of the pandemic, all of our public safety members deserve volumes of credit for their perseverance and hard work.



The changes to the virus and our preparedness resulted in constant (and continuing) updates to the NH EMS protocols around Covid response, PPE, and decontamination. Early in the pandemic, all PPE was hard to come by. Fremont was an innovator in this regard, purchasing equipment that could be properly decontaminated in-house and reused. (This photo features EMS Captain Vin O'Connor in some of the gear. Photo courtesy of Mark DeVeber).

Exposure and quarantine algorithms are constantly changing and are still updated frequently. The need to be ready, resourceful, quick-thinking and adaptive have never been more evident. Our Fire, EMS and Police staff have certainly answered the call. First responders have been amazing in this crazy unpredictable year!

One of the things we missed most in 2020 (aside from basic human contact and seeing people SMILE) were our many Veteran events. Our Memorial Day, Veterans Day and Wreaths Across America events were all cancelled. We are richer for the experiences and stories shared at these events, by Americans who have shaped the world we live in. You were not forgotten just because of the pandemic. We hope that we may be able to hold some of these events again later in 2021.

We thank our Veterans Past and Present, for your sacrifice and your immense service to our Country. The Selectmen chose the cover of the Town Report to commemorate our Annual Wreaths Across America Program. You are not forgotten.

Our 2020 budget was not spent completely as planned. We began buying more bleach and other cleaning supplies, Chlorox wipes, masks and gloves (all unplanned) and some of our staff stayed home in the early months of the pandemic (also unplanned). Our budget at year end was not fully spent, and some projects that could not be finished prior to year end were encumbered. We will return about \$40,000 to the General Fund to offset the current year tax rate. The Selectmen have proposed our two Expendable Trust Fund Articles be funded from the Unreserved Fund Balance, so that these savings accounts will grow without further impact to the tax rate.

I spent a lot of time working on reimbursement and grant forms for CARES, FEMA and other Covid reimbursements. Mark DeVeber, our EMD, submitted the FEMA documentation near year end, and we hope to see reimbursement in 2021. CARES recovered a great deal of our costs, and also provided for a First Responder Stipend program for those on the front lines.



The work of the 2020 revaluation was slowed by the pandemic, but finished on time. Our Office staff had completed much of the credit, exemption and Current Use reviews late in 2019. MRI Assessors then completed work of final inspections and data analysis. The new values were initially published in July with hearings in late July and early August. The majority of hearings and reviews were completed virtually, though in-person meetings were safely held at the Library. Values overall were up nearly \$125 million dollars given the prior two years of sales data. This resulted in a lower tax rate, and overall the process went very well.

The quarterly reviews that have been part of our contract cycle made this work flow much better, and is something we will continue in future contracts. Anyone who has questions or concerns about their value can contact the Selectmen's Office. Abatements are due no later than noon on Monday March 1, 2021. We are also happy to mail out a copy of your property card to you for review, just call or email the Selectmen's Office.

Assessors working in the field are confirming sales information and checking data and listing statistics for properties. They always have MRI identification and a letter from the Town with their name and vehicle information. If you have any questions about this work, please feel free to call the Selectmen's Office and speak with Jeanne (x 303), Kathy (x 302) or Heidi (x 301). As always, pickup work includes any property changes (building permits and other property improvements) and sales information updates if you have recently bought your home. We are still determining the effect of the new utility legislation, which has provided some relief in terms of property values for our 2020 tax rate. Work continued on homes within Jacob's Cove and Gristmill Road; and new subdivisions on South Road and Currier Lane. Commercial development continued at the Industrial Park at 663 Main Street and former Spaulding & Frost site. There are several other new developments being proposed as we look to the new year.

Our long-term retired Fire Chief Richard "Hez" Heselton passed away in August after a short period of illness. Anyone who knew Dick will never forget him, full of New England Yankee spirit and a never-ending resource to all who knew him. He could fix anything, remember almost everything, and was one of the handiest people I have ever known. He repurposed old things, kept anything that may again be useful, and had a veritable tool box everywhere he travelled. Long after he retired in 2008, Dick helped us to find things, remember important details, provide historic perspective, and did the odd jobs that only he knew how to do. We will forever miss his contributions, kind smile, and can-do New England spirit!

On August 31 we gathered with Dick's Family at the Fremont Safety Complex where Fire Rescue Members planted a tree in his memory by the Smokey Bear Fire



Danger Day sign along the driveway. I also reprinted with the Fire Rescue report herein, a tribute prepared for Hez at the time of his retirement in 2008. Those photos brought back a lot of wonderful memories of a long and noted career in the fire service.

Chief Butler came home after his bone marrow transplant in August. Just into the new year he is returning to some administrative duties with the Department, and we continue to wish him well in his recovery. (This photo courtesy of Kristy Butler on one of his “releases” this spring.) Most fitting, he often had a room that overlooked the ambulance bay at Mass General Hospital! Rich’s amazingly good attitude and strong spirit has been a model for all of us!



We said good-bye to other Town employees this year, and wish them all good luck in their various new adventures! This includes Michael Paradie from our Maintenance staff, John Owens and Jack Mullen from the Highway Department, Rachel Edwards and Vinnie Morrison from the Library; and Gregg Arvanitis from the Building Inspection office. Kurtis

Boissonneault transitioned to part-time status at year end with the Fremont Police Department.

Former Conservation Commission Chair John Whiteside passed away in November. John had most-recently been part of a musical group using the third floor of the Town Hall for benefit concerts (generally for the Fremont Food Pantry) to play their beautiful music for the public. John and his wife Holly were involved in some of the Open Space and conservation initiatives which have led to land preservation in Fremont.

Also a late note, fellow North Road musician (former Fremont resident) Edward Wall passed away in 2019. Ed was a leader in the early 1990’s in Fremont Recycling efforts and began our Bulky Day traditions as well. Ed and Paula had moved from Fremont to a retirement community in Peabody MA, but kept in touch with their Fremont friends.

Our wonderful Garden Club spruced up the flagpole at the Fremont Highway Shed, caring for the new plants in a drought-stricken year. The Fremont Garden Club and their energy and enthusiasm continues to beautify this community. They are a dedicated group that will take on any project of need, 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 hosted a total of four (and three were major NH and US Elections) Elections in 2020. This photo is from the February Primary,



probably the easiest as Covid had not fully set in! The organization and setup of these events is monumental. Election Officials and our Moderator do an excellent job of getting voters where they need to be. Maintenance staff is key to the setup! The November General Election saw a record number of voters. There were 2,255 people who walked through our lines on Election Day. There was about an hour-long line almost all day wrapped around Ellis School. There were an additional 615 absentee ballots processed, for a grand total of 2,870 ballots. There were also 243 new voters registered on November 3rd. This brought our total number of registered voters to 3,961.

We can't thank you enough for your patience as we worked to get people in and out as quickly and efficiently as possible. We also welcomed a new Assistant Moderator Jamie Thompson. The previous Assistant (and School District Moderator) Peter Marggraf moved from Fremont this summer.

Pre-processing of absentee ballots, which were high in number due to Covid, was also allowed by new legislation for the November Election. This helped the efficiency of that process on Election Day, when the actual ballots are counted the same as if you vote in person (through the ballot machine). Thanks to Bill Millios, we were also able to live broadcast this process, which is like an assembly line. Election folks really did an amazing job in 2020!

The Selectmen and I spent the fall months meeting regularly with the Budget Committee presenting the budget for 2021. These meetings are a good way to learn more about the budget details. We try to plan Budget Committee meetings on the alternative Wednesday nights from the Planning Board as the basement meeting room is the most efficient room to broadcast from. When that is not possible, we are able to live broadcast meetings from both the basement and first floors of the Town Hall, utilizing Channels 22 (primary) and 13. All meetings are also rebroadcast on a schedule, and available on Vimeo. We find a great many people accessing meetings and events via both of these venues. We worked hard in this Covid year to get as much on the channel as possible, including regular updates about the virus, Town services, and other current news and announcements.

Also this Fall Eagle Scout Candidate Kenneth Adams and his family began work on a ramp at Memorial Fields to make access easier from the parking area to the fields. He was also assisted by Nancy Murray, who on behalf of the Town's Parks & Recreation Commission, got a \$4,000 grant from AARP that fully funded Kenneth's work!

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. As we continue to try and do more with less, our staff perseveres. 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.

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) Conservation Commission, Parks & Recreation Commission, and FCTV. We do need your help! 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 and find a Committee, Board or special project/event that interests you. Come on out and see what is going on! You can watch more and more meetings and events on FCTV Channels 13 and 22! Our bulletin board is also full of information for residents.

This year traditional community service was supplemented by so many wonderful people who wanted to help others during such uncertain times. We had mask trees at the Town Hall and Safety Complex where a multitude of mask-makers would clip homemade masks at all hours of the day and night. This was advertised on Facebook and town venues, for anyone in need to grab a mask! This continues, and was supplemented this winter by warm knitted scarves and hats that are in boxes at the front and rear of the Town Hall. "Giving Hands" knitters from Fremont and surrounding areas (including the local RayFre Center and the Londonderry Methodist Church) have kept the boxes full all winter. Please help yourself if you need one! If you can't get here, let me know and we will get something to you! Many people also baked and cooked for public safety and our staff, and we so appreciate your thoughtfulness!

The Selectmen continue to meet 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 all Boards and Committees are posted to the Town's website once approved. Please let us know what else you would like to see posted and available as we are always trying to reach out with more information that people want to see. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or for general information at 895 2226 x 301 or by email at [hcarlson@fremont.nh.gov](mailto: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*

Photos courtesy of Mark DeVeber, Kristy Butler and Heidi Carlson