

Town Report Submission for 2015

Todd Selig, Administrator

12/31/15

The Town of Durham continues to be economically and prudently operated. We function as a purveyor of public services, and town staff, elected, and appointed officials are working to implement business practices to control costs and maintain the municipality's fiscal position despite many competing pressures ranging from master plan work to moving ahead with long-deferred capital needs to land conservation. From preserving the quality of life within our traditional residential neighborhoods to taking steps to address the potential impacts of climate change, many individuals have collectively worked diligently on behalf of the community in 2015.

The Town's weekly "Friday Updates" serves to keep the Town Council and members of the community informed of news and happenings in Durham. Over 3,100 people subscribe to this weekly broadcast. Durham has once again bolstered its Twitter and Facebook presence in order to meet the demands of residents' changing preferences for information distribution. For example, 567 individuals have signed up for our Twitter feed and 1,247 individuals follow Durham on Facebook. The goal is to keep residents informed of local affairs so they may become involved when issues are of interest to them thereby bolstering Durham's social capital.

Durham's last Master Plan was written in 2000. The Town commenced an update in 2011 with a lengthy citizen engagement process that included a public forum and community survey. A Master Plan Advisory Committee was formed at that time to assist the Planning Board in overseeing the process. Significant headway was made in 2014 and 2015 with the following ten chapters ultimately being adopted by the Planning Board in November 2015: Agricultural Resources, Downtown and Commercial Core, Economic Development, Energy, Historical Resources, Natural Resources, Recreation, Community Character, Housing and Demographics, and Land Use (Existing). Budget permitting, we will likely take on updating the Master Plan for Future Land Uses in 2017.

Over the last year, the Town has continued to pursue Long-Term Economic as well as Environmental Sustainability, which are inextricably linked. Without economic sustainability, the Town will not have the financial resources available over the long-term to stabilize the tax rate, pursue desired projects/infrastructure, preserve open space, etc. Without a healthy natural environment, we will not sustain the Durham in which citizens hope and desire to live, work, and play. The 2011 Master Plan survey was very clear in pointing out that residents of the community seek balance. The notion of seeking a state of balance in Durham continues today.

In the area of land conservation, the Town has been working with The Nature Conservancy relative to securing a conservation easement on the 40 +/- acre Hills/Emery Farm property located along Route 4 directly across from the Emery Farm farm stand. In

addition, the Town has worked with the Southeast Land Trust as part of an effort to conserve the 40 +/- acre Thompson Forest parcel located along Wednesday Hill Road abutting the Durham-UNH Water System pump station on the Lamprey River. We anticipate the Thompson Forest parcel will close in January 2016. Durham, working in concert with our regional land stewardship partners, has pursued grant funding to help offset the cost of these projects.

In 2016, the “Powder Major” (or Goss family) parcel consisting of approximately 227 acres at the juncture of Durham, Lee, and Madbury near Tibbetts Field/Rt.155 in Madbury will be a project for discussion in conjunction with the Society for Protection of NH Forests.

Durham has experienced significant economic development activity between 2012 and 2015, which will serve to provide increased tax base moving forward. New construction increased the Town’s tax base from \$916,456,045 in 2014 to \$964,931,959 in 2015, an increase of \$48.5 million or 5.2%. Historically, our tax base has grown by around 1% per year. We project that the tax base will grow by an additional \$37.6 million to \$1,002,580,718 in 2016, an increase of 3.9%.

The downtown Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district is estimated to capture \$127.9 million in new value by 2016 as a result of new construction value created there since its establishment on April 1, 2013. At present, the district retains 7% of the tax dollars generated from this captured value for purposes established by the Council within the downtown TIF, and 93% of captured value is released to the General Fund and is incorporated into the estimated valuation numbers noted in the preceding paragraph. When the TIF district is eventually retired, all captured value will be released to the General Fund. The primary purpose for captured downtown TIF monies is to help fund the creation of additional parking to support Durham’s downtown core, the businesses located there, and the ability of full time residents to easily access goods and services in town.

Last year, the Council established as a goal to ensure any increase to the municipal portion of the tax rate not exceed the rate of inflation, which then equaled 1.7%. The Administrator and Town Council were ultimately able to achieve this 2015 budgetary goal with a 2015 tax rate of \$8.48. In 2015, the Durham Town Council established the following budget goal as part of its annual goal setting process for 2016, and the 2016 adopted budget is consistent with that goal: *“Task the administrator with developing an operating budget that holds the municipal tax rate at \$8.48.”*

In late-2013, the Council approved the acceptance of \$125,000 from the US Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), for the purpose of hiring a 20th police officer who is focused on “problem oriented policing.” This additional resource has enabled the Police Department to address some of the impacts of poorly managed non-owner occupied college student housing within Durham’s traditional residential neighborhoods surrounding the downtown core both in 2014 and

2015. The grant ends in 2016 but due to the program's measurable success, I anticipate it will be sustained for the foreseeable future.

Durham's new 12,187 sq. ft. state of the art Town Hall at 8 Newmarket Road celebrated its 1-year anniversary on October 23, 2015. Following an extensive RFP process, Durham ultimately sold the former Town Office site at 15 Newmarket Road to a local technology company, Applied Geosolutions, for the sum of \$650,000. Applied Geosolutions plans to invest around \$600,000 in the building. The town has required that any redevelopment of the site not impact its spot on the National Register of Historical Places.

Following numerous permitting delays, construction on the new UNH Outdoor Pool commenced in 2015. At 14,355 sq. ft., the +/- \$5 million structure paid for fully by UNH will be one of the largest outdoor pools in New Hampshire. UNH anticipates that the facility will open in the August 2016 timeframe.

This year the Town and UNH, through the administrative joint Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Committee, continued to address a multitude of joint Town/Gown items to include bringing on line the Spruce Hole Well in fall 2015, focusing attention in 2013, 2014, and 2015 on water quality deficiencies within the Great Bay Estuary (nitrogen) as identified by the NHDES and the EPA, meeting EPA wastewater and stormwater MS-4 mandates, implementing a required NHDES backflow prevention program, water tank refurbishing/painting, and more.

Significant energy has been dedicated in 2014 and 2015 toward working with UNH as part of a collaborative public/public/private development project in downtown Durham to include numerous potential elements such as the UNH bookstore (in lieu of the present Memorial Union Building location), professional office space, small hotel, retail and restaurant space, and possible over 55 housing within the downtown core in the vicinity of 66 Main Street, the former ATO fraternity site. The Council and USNH Board of Trustees approved a Memorandum of Understanding between Durham and UNH in 2015. Look forward to additional discussions around this partnership in 2016.

Durham's vision for our Parks & Recreation Department is that it will offer a wide variety of opportunities and concentrations for all residents of any age wishing to participate in accessible, affordable activities. The department also manages the Churchill Rink and is working closely with the Conservation Commission to introduce residents to the numerous open space properties the Town controls. In spring 2015, Durham said farewell to Director Stefanie Frazee and hello to incoming Director Rachel Gasowski.

In response to the goal of becoming a more pedestrian and bicycle friendly community, the Town moved forward numerous efforts in 2015 to delineate many roadways within our downtown core with "share the road" (or sharrows) markings and signage. 45 such yellow signs on wooden posts were installed throughout community.

Other efforts to better delineate bicycle and pedestrian friction points were also evaluated and many were acted upon including the application of green paint within bicycle areas at specific corners in the downtown to assist bicyclists in navigating the downtown core more effectively and safely.

As a result of new development, specific sidewalk sections along Church Hill and Madbury Road were widened, and the pocket park at Main Street and Mill Road was completely refurbished as part of the Pauly's Pockets project. The pocket park at the corner of Main Street and Pettee Brook Lane was also refurbished in 2014 with excellent results. And the new Madbury Commons project at 17-21 Madbury Road provides a new and attractive pedestrian connection between Madbury Road and Pettee Brook Lane (and Main Street beyond).

In an effort to enhance Durham's resiliency and sustainability in an era of Climate Change and Peak Oil, following many, many months of discussions/negotiations the Town partnered with ReVision Energy and IGS Solar, pursued and was awarded a \$500,000 grant from the NH Public Utilities Commission, obtained approval by the Govern and Executive Council by a narrow 3-2 vote, worked through a PILOT agreement with the Town of Lee, entered into an agreement with the Oyster River Cooperative School District for power purchase, negotiated required connections arrangements with Eversource, and the Town Council ultimately approved in late-fall 2015 moving forward with executing contracts for the construction of a 640 kW DC solar array in Durham's Packers Falls Gravel Pit. We believe this project will be the 2nd largest solar array in the State of New Hampshire. Construction will take place in early 2016.

Oyster River School District Superintendent of Schools James Morse and I worked to remain in active communication with one another regarding issues of mutual interest/concern. It is helpful to note that Town Councilor Kenny Rotner is also a member of the ORCSD School Board, in this way ensuring there is very good communication between Durham and the ORCSD School Board as well relative to issues of mutual interest.

A great deal of work has been devoted to addressing human resource issues in Durham in 2015. Collective bargaining contract negotiations were kicked off in the fall between the Town and the AFSCME Unit representing our public works personnel, and with the Durham Professional Firefighters Association (DPFFA Unit) representing our firefighters and fire inspectors. A common theme in these discussions has revolved around increasing employee contributions toward health insurance premiums.

I am pleased to report that in addition to the many tangible efforts noted in this report, Durham has received numerous accolades over the last two years that include:

- The No. 1 town in N.H. for young families by NerdWallet.com, a personal finance website.

- The fifth most exciting place in the state by Movoto, a real estate brokerage based in California.
- The No. 1 town in the state for population and job growth from 2010 to 2012 by Nerdwallet.com
- The second safest community in the state by Safe Choice Security, a national provider of security systems.
- The No. 2 place to live for “20-somethings” in the country by CNNMoney.
- The top community in NH for equal treatment for the LGBTQ community by the Human Rights Campaign.
- Oyster River High School ranked in the top 1 percent of more than 14,000 schools evaluated by Newsweek.
- A great place for the young at heart by the Boston Globe.
- 6th safest college town in the USA by Safewise.

It is not an accident that Durham is so highly regarded. The residents who live here are smart, entrepreneurial, always taking the long-term perspective, focused on the environment, community oriented, and committed to quality education. The Town is blessed with amazing natural resources as well: the Great Bay, the Oyster River, the Lamprey River, the Spruce Hole Bog, Wagon Hill Farm, numerous natural gateways leading into and out of the community, and more. But it is not only that we have these natural treasures. Durham has had the foresight to protect them through local decision-making, good planning, prudent management, and a lot of hard work. The University of New Hampshire also provides social, cultural, and athletic opportunities for the community, not to mention it's an economic driver for Durham and the entire region. And our Town employees — public works, police, fire, planning, zoning, and more — they are good people, working hard with limited resources to meet the needs of citizens who have high expectations for exceptional service delivery at the local level. While taxes are undeniably high in Durham, for all of these reasons, home sales remain strong, commercial investment is active, the tax base is growing, and the positive sense of community is pervasive.