

Town of Durham
Year End Wrap Up for 2021

Todd Selig, Administrator

12/31/21

Reflecting on this past year under continuing pandemic conditions, I am very proud of the resiliency of our many departments, boards, committees, and commissions – and of our community -- and all that we were collectively able to accomplish. Town staff, elected, and appointed officials continue to work diligently to address community needs, control costs, and maintain the municipality's fiscal position despite competing pressures. From preserving the quality of life within our traditional residential neighborhoods, to closing out the Eversource Seacoast Reliability Project, to moving Durham toward being more sustainable in the face of Climate Change, to grappling with human rights and societal issues, to fine tuning and remaining in conformance with changing rules concerning the method of public meeting access via physically distant Zoom technology, to managing development pressures/processes, to reevaluating and responding to the changing recycling market, to securing a \$13,500 LCHIP grant to plan for preserving the Chesley-Bickford farmhouse at Wagon Hill Farm, many dedicated people have collectively worked hard on behalf of the community in 2021. Ever-present, pandemic conditions slow processes, add constantly changing health/safety protocols, sideline staff/volunteers (due to quarantines/illness), and make everything just that much more difficult.

Our weekly "Friday Updates" continue to keep the Town Council and members of the community informed of news and happenings in Durham. Nearly 3,400 individuals subscribe to this weekly broadcast. Durham also continues to utilize its Twitter and Facebook presence in order to meet the demands of residents' changing preferences for information distribution. Our goal is to keep residents informed of local affairs so they may become engaged when issues are of interest/importance to them. It's not a professional publication, however, so subscribers are asked to keep their expectations for coverage reasonable as we work to provide updates as time allows amidst many other competing responsibilities.

Moody's Investors Services reported on May 4, 2021, that the credit position for Durham is very high quality. Its Aa2 bond rating is a little stronger than the US cities median of Aa3. Notable credit factors include a robust financial position, a very strong wealth and income profile, and an adequate tax base. It also reflects a small debt burden and a somewhat inflated pension liability. The financial position of the Town is robust and is relatively favorable in comparison to the Aa2 rating assigned. The cash balance as a percent of operating revenues (95.3%) is far above the US median, and stayed the same between 2015 and 2019. Moreover, the fund balance as a percent of operating revenues (31.2%) is consistent with other Moody's-rated cities nationwide. The debt and pension liabilities of Durham are moderate overall. The Town's net direct debt to full value

(1.6%) is slightly higher than the US median. These indices are all indicative of measured success in realizing the Town's fiscal goals.

The Durham Police Department has long been engaged with a professional accreditation process through CALEA (www.calea.org) because it provides us with assurances that our police department is engaged in providing best practices to our citizens due to inspections by an outside independent entity. CALEA accreditation also provides feedback from outside subject-specific professionals about new and innovative practices that may be applicable to the Durham community. With all of the national discussions surrounding police, we recognize locally that the delivery of services to the community must involve transparency and open opportunities for input and feedback. The comprehensive 2021 CALEA accreditation review and report provided a wide array of topical discussions about the department's use of force, police discipline, bias, and community engagement. In 1999 the Durham Police Department was first awarded accredited status. At that time it was one of only 13 departments our size throughout the country to have attained the level of accreditation that the department was awarded. Since our initial accreditation the department has been awarded the distinction of "Meritoriously Accredited." CALEA awarded our department with accreditation status again this year.

Oyster River School District Superintendent of Schools James Morse and I continue to work to remain in regular communication with one another regarding issues of mutual interest/concern. Construction of the new net zero, LEED Certified Middle School has been a top priority and area of focus for 2021, a project for which we have this year modified traffic patterns around the facility along Dennison Avenue, Coe Drive, and Strafford Avenue. I serve on the weekly construction committee for the new facility. Town Councilor Allan Howland also serves as a member of the ORCSD School Board. In these ways we strive to ensure there remains good communication between Durham and the ORCSD relative to issues of mutual interest.

This was a very busy year for Durham Parks & Recreation where the department carefully balanced the goal of offering a regular line-up of events and programs while continuously adapting plans and efforts around the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. Despite the challenges we were faced to navigate, the department had a very successful year both financially and with program registrations. Throughout 2021 Durham Parks & Rec. offered an array of 100+ program opportunities and hosted ten special events for the community. Summer camp enrollment grew to record numbers where staff safely and successfully hosted nine unique weeks of summer camp, including: two weeks of STEM based camps, five weeks of REACH Summer camp (in partnership with ORCSD), and two weeks of adventure-based camps. Five camp field trips also took place. The department's outdoor based after school programs (in partnership with Seven River Paddling) proved to be invaluable as registration quickly filled for each of the offered classes and sessions. Participation in our adult programs remained strong with classes meeting both virtually and in-person throughout the year. Looking ahead, the department

hopes to reestablish the Adult Arts Trips that toured community members around New England in past years. Another 2021 highlight for the department was the partnership that was established with Gunstock Mtn. Resort, where Durham offered a community ski and snowboard program through Gunstock's Outreach Program. Over 133 families took advantage of the program and 110 participated in the lesson option on Wednesdays in January. With Wednesdays being a remote learning day for most of the school year in 2020/21, many ORCSD families enjoyed the mid-week change in schedule to be at the mountain.

Durham again received the top-ranking score in NH by the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equity Index relative to addressing LGBTQ concerns – 96 out of 100 points. We sponsored programming celebrating Indigenous Peoples' Day in 2019, 2020, and 2021.

Over the last year, Durham 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 or necessary municipal infrastructure enhancements, preserve open space, etc. Without a healthy natural environment, we will not sustain the Durham in which residents hope and desire to live, work, and play. Both the 2011 and 2017 Master Plan processes indicated residents of the community seek balance.

Projected sea level rise will contribute in the years ahead to the gradual inundation of coastal areas. We're already seeing it -- and are responding locally. A brand new living shoreline (Phase I) at the Town's Wagon Hill Farm was completed in late 2019, so we now have 350 feet of shoreline restored, re-graded, armored with natural hard and soft-scape materials, and planted to restore the salt marsh and tidal buffer that has eroded over time. It's a project that took 4+ years of design and close collaboration between the Town, state/Federal regulators, the NHDES Coastal Program, the Harbor Master, the Strafford Regional Planning Commission, and UNH environmental researchers utilizing around \$500,000 in local and state grant funds. It has now become a regional demonstration project for living shorelines, and an additional \$213,765 was targeted for 2021/2022 utilizing monies negotiated with Eversource, along with matching funds from a highly competitive National Fish & Wildlife Foundation grant, to continue to make shoreline stabilization enhancements at the property (Phases II and III) and beyond within the Great Bay region.

Durham continued working with the Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) in 2021 utilizing NHDES funding to study the potential impact of sea level rise on fresh water private wells within the community. It's an interesting initiative focusing on an issue that, until now, has literally been out of site and out of mind. And work on the new Climate Adaptation chapter of the Durham Master Plan is also under way, coordinated by the Administrator's Office, utilizing grant monies and in partnership with SRPC and UNH Cooperative Extension.

Over the years, Durham has replaced all of its roadside and decorative street lighting with energy efficient LED fixtures. We've installed, under an umbrella power purchase agreement (or PPA), 120 kW of solar capacity at our police station, the public library, and Churchill Rink. This was followed up with a 640 kW solar array at our gravel pit in Lee, NH. Together, these efforts have allowed Durham to offset 100% of the electric demand of all municipal infrastructure with renewable power with the exception of our wastewater treatment plant – where we purchase 100% green wind power through Constellation Energy. As part of the FY 2021 budget development process, the Town Council approved a recommendation of the Energy Committee to move forward in 2021 with the purchase of the solar arrays at the rink, police station, and library. This year's Energy Committee report outlines numerous significant strides in our local sustainability efforts realized through joining the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy initiative, the work of our UNH Sustainability Fellow (in particular the topic of carbon sequestration within Durham's town forests and conservation land holdings) overseen by the Administrator's Office, as well as our joining and becoming a founding member of the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire to work toward providing wider accessibility of green energy for our community's electric utility customers.

A partial result of Durham's monitoring and active involvement with the Eversource Seacoast Reliability Project, the NH Preservation Alliance recognized the new 115 kilovolt transmission line stretching from Madbury, through Durham and Newington, to Portsmouth, for exceeding state requirements and federally mandated compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. "The high-quality survey of archaeological and historic resources yielded significant results, and a variety of mitigation measures included the temporary relocation and full rehabilitation of the historic Little Bay Underwater Terminal Cable House in Durham."

We have painstakingly worked over many years to create a municipal water system that is inherently resilient in order to reliably provide approximately 1.2 million gals/day of water to both town and campus. Together, Durham/UNH operate four water sources, one of which utilizes an artificial recharge system pumping raw water from the Lamprey River to our Spruce Hole Aquifer in Lee during times of plentiful flow, increasing our reserves for drought conditions. A new \$20 million Water Treatment Plant on the UNH campus was also completed in 2019/2020, deploying state of the art technology – replacing an aged/outdated facility, for the benefit of UNH and Durham water users alike. The construction cost of the new plant was 100% borne by the University. While the entire region struggled with drought conditions during summer/fall 2020, the Durham/UNH water supply remained sustainably secure for our water users. This is the result of good planning and active collaboration between Durham and UNH.

The Town and UNH, through the joint administrative Water, Wastewater, Stormwater, and Roads Committee, continue to address a multitude of Town/Gown items to include efficient operation of our water combined system as described above, focusing

attention 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 (the Total Nitrogen General Permit was ultimately issued by EPA in December 2020), maintaining a required NHDES backflow prevention program, general water/sewer infrastructure, the Lee water line extension (currently under construction) in coordination with the NHDES to address MBTE contamination at the Lee Traffic Circle, and more. On the front lines of our utility infrastructure both on and off campus, the Town and the University are joined at the hip and work seamlessly together.

On this note, we have developed cooperative and collaborative efforts with UNH to enhance the mutual intellectual, cultural, environmental, social, and economic benefits associated with hosting New Hampshire's flagship state university, including redevelopment of 66 Main Street (which Durham purchased from UNH in 2021), the vision of a West Edge Innovation District (which is idle at the moment due to the pandemic), and more. Town and gown continue to communicate and work toward the redevelopment of 66 Main Street with Elliott Sidewalk Communities out of Maryland.

Through the efforts of Tom Brightman (who seamlessly took the reins in early 2021 from Ellen Snyder), our part-time contract Land Stewardship Coordinator, and the Land Stewardship Subcommittee of the Conservation Commission, we continue to make significant inroads in actively managing the numerous lands and easements under the Town's stewardship. The Council also established the Durham Town Land Stewardship Patron's Trust back in 2018 to enable citizens or organizations to donate money to support our local conservation land management efforts, rather than relying solely on tax dollars for this purpose. These monies, as well as the Conservation Fund under the oversight of the Conservation Commission, have provided an ongoing source of modest funding to move targeted stewardship initiatives forward.

The Durham Town Council voted 7-2 on September 13, 2021, to award a Final Design Contract to Vanasse Hagen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB) for removal of the Mill Pond Dam (Alternative #5). Subsequently, the Town Clerk on October 18, 2021, certified a Referendum Petition to put the approval of the VHB final design contract to a vote of the residents at a special election. As such, the matter will be a question on the upcoming election ballot on March 8, 2022. Following much discussion and review, the Council on November 1, 2021, discussed and adopted the following motion: *The Durham Town Council approved the Final Design Contract for Alternative # 5 - Dam Removal to Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. for the sum of \$284,226 and authorized the Administrator to sign said contract with the monies coming from Account #07-2185-801-36-000 and #07-1784-800-36-000 if the March 8, 2022 Petition to Reconsider this motion fails.* (APPROVED 9-0)

As part of the 2021 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) Durham approved a project to replace the Town's public safety core radio communication infrastructure as it has approached and now exceeded its end of life (December 31st, 2020). The 2021 CIP allotted \$1,385,000 (Police - \$665,000 and Fire - \$720,000) in two lines for this project.

This project was initially conceived as a direct replacement for the core infrastructure the Town purchased as part of changing dispatching service to the Strafford County Dispatch Center over a decade ago. As such it would have provided a level of coverage commensurate to what the Town enjoys today. After receiving initial pricing in late 2017 the Town learned of a larger project that the County had to improve their radio resources. This presented an opportunity for all parties to improve overall radio service by integrating tightly with Strafford County on communication services. After a long deliberative process, and with a request for proposals (RFP), the County selected Motorola Solutions to provide them a county-wide Land Mobile Radio (LMR) network. During our review, Durham immediately saw deficiencies in the proposed coverage and requested the County revisit the modeling they were using to calculate in-building radio signal coverage to service Durham police and fire units on the ground. Since the county's larger project needs to provide a basic level among all the clients it services, they determined they would be unable to enhance coverage directly for the Town of Durham. As such, Durham reached out collaboratively with the County, but independently as the Town, to Motorola to find a solution that both dovetailed with the County's infrastructure plans, but also and more importantly still allows the flexibility for Durham agencies to be dispatched on our own hard-won frequencies. We believe the current iteration of Motorola's proposal accomplished this while preserving the reduced pricing they were able to offer as part of the larger Strafford County project. As such, the Town Council awarded the contract upon recommendation of the Administrator on December 20, 2021.

In closing, I would like to note that our Town employees within public works, police, fire, planning, zoning, town clerk/tax collector's Office, IT, DCAT, and more — are outstanding people, working hard with finite resources to meet the needs of a demanding citizenry with high expectations for exceptional service delivery at the local level. Our Town Council is comprised of thoughtful, hard-working, and dedicated individuals with varied backgrounds and perspectives. The Council, along with the benefit of ongoing public feedback and active involvement by dedicated citizens on local boards, committees, and commissions, all contribute to ensuring Durham remains a strong, vibrant, and welcoming community. While this has again been a challenging year in Durham as a result of the pandemic, our town has accomplished a great deal very well under continuingly difficult circumstances.