

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator Sept 2017

By Stephen Halleran

Cornish Fair and apple season, both clear indications that the summer of 2017 is moving along swiftly. The 2017 budget so far is on par with our expectations. As of this writing, there is 36% of the budget year remaining and we have 36% of the budget remaining. The budget is a little tight, but still well within the acceptable range going into fall. The taxpayer me wants it exactly that way, the Town Administrator me would sleep just a little better if we had say 38% of the budget remaining with 36% of the year left.

Senate Bill 38: The good news of the summer for town affairs has been that Governor Sununu and the legislature (SB 38) has made some \$30 million unanticipated dollars available to town's and cities for road and bridge work. Plainfield's apportionment is \$99,000. It is likely that your Selectboard will decide to utilize the funds to replace the Camp Road Bridge, keeping our bridge capital reserve fund intact for work on the Ladeau Road Bridge, the next one on the list. A required public hearing to accept the funds is scheduled for September 6th here at the Meriden Town Hall at 7pm. In my experience you are far more likely to catch one of those old tagged trout still swimming in the Blow-me-down than you are on any given year to get an extra \$100,000 from the State of New Hampshire for local roads and bridges. This truly is very good news that will save the property taxpayers of Plainfield money.

Meriden Library Building Committee: The Trustees have appointed a committee to begin planning for the replacement of the Meriden Library. This group will build on the work done by previous committees who have concluded that the most cost effective way to address the needs of the Meriden Library building is to start over with a new modest facility that will address the needs of our community. The group's first meeting is Tuesday September 5th at 7pm here at the Meriden Town Hall.

Planning and Zoning: It's been a busy summer for the ZBA and Planning Board. Plainfield may well be welcoming three new businesses/organizations to our community. The Mt. Valley Treatment Center has been approved to move its anxiety treatment program for students into the former Home Hill Inn property. The organization specializes in teenage students who attend a 60-90 day program at the facility before returning to their school.

Brite Lite Electric of Windsor Vermont, will be setting up headquarter in the G&S Trucking building on Route 12A in Plainfield Village. They are an electrical contracting firm that operates a half dozen or so trucks. They focus on large residential and commercial projects.

Robert Boylan has just begun the land use planning process for developing a food distribution warehouse on the 3.5 acre parcel formerly B&S Trucking on Route 12A not far from the Edgewater Farm Stand. A lot of details are still unknown, but any opportunity to return that property to productive use seems like a positive. The trucking

business burnt to the ground in the early 1990's and the property has been in a state of flux since that time.

2018 Budget: This is absolutely the right time to be communicating with the Selectboard about any changes you'd like to see in town services. We will soon be starting out work on the new budget. Come see us at an upcoming Selectboard meeting and tell us what you like and what you don't. The Board meets the first and third Wednesday of each month. Check the town website for the exact details. www.plainfieldnh.org

As you can see there are plenty of things to keep us going through late summer and into early fall. If we can help or provide some information on something that has your attention, stop in at either the town offices or the Plainfield Library during office hours and lets talk.

Steve Halleran

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator-July/August 2017

By Stephen Halleran

Cornfield Trout Tournament, June 1991: As with all remembrances, context is important to properly understanding the events. In October of 1989 Plainfield's tax rate had increased a heart stopping 24%. The number of school age children was increasing at a furious pace (remember this was just before cable, we still interacted with our spouses); the town had just added a second full time Police Officer (Larry Dore) and had hired an Administrative Assistant to the Selectboard (me). Now, we constantly grumble about how hard it is to get folks to engage with their local government. I can report to you in no uncertain circumstances that a 24% tax rate increase will get you civic involvement. The "Plainfield Auction Barn Group" was quickly formed and we had all the help from our local citizenry that we could stand. A committee worked on school expenses, another on town expenses, a third committee was studying alternative revenues. User fees for various things was a hot topic. Deforesting and even selling town owned properties was under heavy consideration, anything that could be converted to cash was fair game.

By the spring of 1991, local budgets had been stripped to the bone, the town budget was on emergency rations, the school board had eliminated athletics from the budget and still the taxes they increased. It was time for drastic measures, gambling! What would happen if you fitted a few live trout with special fin tags and released these "lucky fish" into our local brooks along with 1,490 of their untagged tank mates and you charged an entry fee to all that wanted to participate! Catch a special tagged fish on a Saturday in June and you win a prize; maybe a \$100 or maybe a car or truck, or \$10,000 good lord the possibilities were endless. Revenue would flow in, the brooks would have some extra fish, participants would likely catch at least a meal of trout, in short the Cornfield Trout Tournament was born, sponsored by local resident Charles "Chuck" Currier. All monies over and above expenses would go to the Cornish and Plainfield Elementary Schools to be used for athletic programs. Apparently, you can buy what amounts to an insurance policy to cover the odds that a tagged fish will be caught in a time certain period. That must be quite an algorithm to work through. I guess you would solve for X. Despite the math, I wonder if the insurance agent bought a bag of trout food and fed those tagged fish all night long before the release.

The record is not clear as to how Cornish came to be included, perhaps it was just too much to resist, the name Cornfield out of Cornish and Plainfield. More likely, it was that the Blow-me-down Brook flows from Plainfield into Cornish and fish are good swimmers, plus the more the merrier, why not let Cornish in on all this fun. A permit were issued by the State of New Hampshire Fish and Game, flyers were printed up and distributed, all was good or was it. The devil, as we know, lives in the details.

The Cornfield Tournament first hits the Plainfield Selectboard record on April 17th when Chief Gillens reports that he has some concerns about a planned fishing derby. The State issued a permit for the event on that very day with no communication with Plainfield or Cornish. Bloods Brook and Blow-me-down may flow through our parrish but apparently

that isn't sufficient reason for the state to talk to the town's. By May 6th the concern has grown to include both Plainfield and Cornish Selectboard's and the School Board's from each town. The School Board's have their backs up, the previously mentioned advertisement flyers posted around town by the organizer seem to indicate sponsorship by the two districts, yet neither district had been formally contacted about the tournament. The tournament organizer is getting mad, he is just trying to cover expenses and turn over some much needed revenue to the ungrateful towns. Private landowners are threatening to post their lands, farmers are concerned that high value first cut hay is about to be trampled by scores of wader wearing sportsman all hoping to catch one of those tagged trout that will make all their dreams come true. As you can see things are starting to go badly so a Cornfield Summit is planned for May 20th 1991. Lawyers are being called sabers are being rattled. The trout, they are still swimming circles in their concrete hatchery tanks unaware of all this.

May 20th comes, Selectmen are reading prepared statements, Fish and Game brass is in attendance and has brought the department's lawyer, Mr. Currier has brought his lawyer, and both School Districts are in contact with their attorneys. Fish and Game drops the bombshell that the permit for the event was mistakenly issued, but if as the Attorney General of the State of New Hampshire has requested (that's right the Cornfield Trout Tournament has the attention of the highest law enforcement office in our state) both School Districts will sign a letter of consent, the event may go forward. Extra game wardens were promised to keep the peace. These brooks are public waters and can be fished by any licensed angler, entry fee paid or not. Tensions are high, what if a tagged trout is fillet and eaten, think of the shattered dreams.

Now at this point the record shows that 290 entry fees of \$15/sport have been collected and deposited into something called Bank East. So, with ten days until the first cast the revenue pot was \$4,350 less expenses (like trout, flyers, overhead etc) to be split between the two districts. I am no accountant, but I wouldn't add on to that house just yet, the solution to Plainfield's tax problem coming from brook trout and games of chance seemed unlikely. The fees to the attorney's consulted about this thing would likely surpass the gross revenue.

In the end, the consent letters were signed, the fish were released and scattered about. Chief Gillens reported to the Selectmen on Wednesday June 5th that no major problems occurred, nor were there any big winners. Farmers got in good hay, a few anglers took home some trout to eat, a bunch of fish survived to swim for another day and what about our school districts? Well, the record does not show any revenues from the tournament. The Selectmen did decide, after this episode, to begin to require raffle permits for town events that involve games of chance.

In my view the life lessons learned were simple, the need for good communication and perhaps most importantly that the way to fund public programs is with public money not games of chance.

Taxes are high and town services should be looked and carefully. Both Plainfield and Cornish successfully survived the 1990's and continue to this day to be great places to call home and raise families. Things like the Cornfield Trout Tournament are the spice that keeps life interesting, the trick, just don't take it too seriously and don't expect a gimmick will ever replace hard work for consistent results.

So, for now we close those dusty minute books and in September we return to the business of budgets, zoning ordinances and yes taxes! Enjoy the summer and good fishing to all.

Steve

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator-June 2017

By Stephen Halleran

The Great Glassing of Whitaker Road July 1991: Now, to be fair the times were different recycling was something new to us all. The Plainfield community has enjoyed curbside collection of garbage since the closing of the old town dump in 1973. Recycling at this time was mostly done by energetic young people driving old Subaru hatchbacks or squared off Volvos. These folks typically operate with a slightly earthy approach to life. Road Agents from that area were not earthy in the green sense, they were earthy from the get on a big machine and move it the hell out of the way sense. Lots of work to be done each year, no time to play around with garbage, burn it our bury it!

In 1990 the Plainfield Selectmen approved the construction of a recycling shed at the highway garage. The small drop off facility can still be seen at the east end of equipment shed. A dedicated group of volunteers staffed the facility a night or two a week and Saturday mornings. Newspaper, cans, glass, textiles, used oil were all collected. Susan Williams of Center of Town Road fame became our Recycling Coordinator with tasks ranging from scheduling volunteers to marketing the collected materials.

So, suddenly the Subaru crowd was firmly entrenched in what had previously been full sized Chevy and Ford truck only territory, the Highway Garage. Trouble could not be too far away. Now, shed space was limited and grant money flowing for recycling related equipment. Glass bottles are bulky and don't pack well. Enter the grant provided glass breaker. This red bottle eating beast that mounted to the top of a 50 gallon drum could take a full 16oz Budweiser bottle and break (break not crush) in into hundreds of sharp shards that would packed efficiently into the drum below. Storage capacity was massively increased, as was the weight of the drums. No Subaru that I am aware of was hauling those things to market; you need loaders and big trucks for that work, highway men.

Enter into our little drama Art Thompson, Plainfield Road Agent, cut from steel cloth. The only descent cigarette was an unfiltered one and more were better than fewer. Art was at the same time the best of Road Agents and the worst of Road Agents. He could fix or fabricate anything, run a road grader as well as any Pike paid professional, in fact for some time he might have been a Pike paid professional grader operator, but he had little patience for what he deemed foolishness. Blunt honesty with residents was not uncommon and could quickly lead to conflict. Art was hired and quit or was fired by the Selectmen at least three times. He also fired his entire crew one day because one of them hid a stray cat in his desk drawer, which apparently was quite anxious to leave when Art opened that drawer sometime later.

So, back to the summer of 1991 the recycling shed was up and running, glass was being broken and as needed hauled with the other materials to market. At some point Sue Williams placed the fateful call to Art for a glass transport and upon arriving the facility was closed the trucks turned away. It is here that things went bad, terribly bad. Fast forward to five o'clock, the first call from Chief Gordon Gillens to Selectman Jay Waldner came in. Something had happened to Whitaker Road, bike and car tires were going flat at an alarming rate. Broken bottles seemed to be the cause; highway had graded the road earlier that day. Jay Waldner and I arrived at the Route 120 end of Whitaker Road where Chief Gillens had set up a command post. The road was closed; the surface

of Whitaker Road had a magical sparkle caused by the flashing cruiser lights. Bits of green, and clear, and brown glass twinkling across the roadway as far as the eye could see. In its own way it was quite beautiful. Things went down hill quite quickly from that moment on. I will never know what possessed a man as smart as Art to spread all that broken glass over the road way and then grade it into the road bed. I suppose he thought he could dump it out and bury into the road and it would be gone, recycled. It was true some places at the time were crushing glass and using it as deep road base material. Breaking and crushing are very different. At the crushed level glass returns to sand, at the broken level it's a weapon. We bought a lot of tires that summer. July 31st 1991 the Selectmen's minutes indicate that Thomas and Katherine Laflam came to the meeting to discuss the glass recycling "experiment" on Whitaker Road. The LaFlams questioned the size of the aggregate and the safety of motorist and pedestrians using the road way. I don't remember Judy Dupree being so kind when she called me and came over with cans and cans of glass she had collected from in front of her house. I do remember speaking as a 23 year old to the Associated Press which had gotten hold of the story and was anxious to learn about our "experiment."

In the end, Art went down to Whitaker Road with the grader windrowed up the top 6" of the road and hauled it away to some undisclosed location as fill. We re-graveled Whitaker Road, bought a few more tires and life went on. Art stayed on the job a few more years and Sue Williams and her staff continued to change the culture in Plainfield about recycling. Curbside recycling soon followed and 25 years later recycling in Plainfield is now what we do without even thinking about it.

Next time we shall, for now, end our memory lane series with the Plainfield Cornish Trout Tournament also of 1991. This was your chance to catch a stocked trout in the Blow-me-down brook with a special tag in its dorsal fin. Prizes for the lucky anglers. Two towns, a couple hundred participants marauding over private land along the brook, the State Fish and Game Commission what could possibly go wrong!

Stephen Halleran

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator- May 2017

By Stephen Halleran

One of the values of being a municipality is our minutes and the historical record that they provide. As time passes our memories tend to either fail us or bend events to fit our preferences. The minute books, gathering dust in the vault, keep us honest and true. I thought it might be fun to take a look back to Selectmen's minutes from April/May of 1990 and see what the hot button issues of the day were at that time. Steve Taylor told me years ago not to get too full of yourself in this business it's all been done before in one form another. In 1990 I would have been 23 years old with a lot more hair and 7 months of the job. Bruce Baird, Jay Waldner and Judy Belyea were our Selectmen. Art Thompson was the Road Agent and Gordon Gillens the Police Chief.

April 18th, 1990: I reported that "the computer" in the office was taken away and will be returned on Friday with software installed. How did we survive two days without "the computer?"

A new micro film reader was ordered for the office. Its now gathering dust in the attic.

Beavers and their resulting dams in wetlands adjacent to Old Country/Hedgehog Road were causing havoc with the roads. They still are.

Grass roots cable was nearly ready to go operational. Little did we know that this would be the beginning of the end of our social fabric. Even with just 30 something channels (up from 4 via the old antenna) husbands and spouses would never have to talk again.

The Brook Road was starting to delaminate. For those that missed it, this was one of the great road debacles in Plainfield's recent history. Perhaps only out done by the great glassing of Whitaker Road, when for reasons that are still unclear highway spread broken glass bottles all over the road as part of a failed recycling experiment (hint, a glass breaker at the recycling shed is much different than a glass crusher). Its true glass is made from sand, but broken into large pieces it acts more like knives than road base, a story for another day. Back to Brook Road, something called a "pug mill" had been used to create our own farmers mixture of sticky asphalt and stone. Think your own paving plant on the cheap. Well, in a nutshell, all hell broke loose along with a rain storm and dozens and dozens of cars were splattered with a sticky mixture of tar and sand/rock bits. It got so bad that the Selectmen held a car wash at the highway garage. We spent a Saturday cleaning cars, dirty in one door, clean out the back door. Well the next spring, April, the new surface began to fail and essential just came off the roadway in chunks. It was a big deal for many months. Finally, with no choice the Selectmen brought in the Pike pavement reclamation machine and we started over basically.

Health insurance was costing as much as \$3,000 per year for a family plan, less of a plan now costs over \$20,000.

April 25th, 1990: Steve Halleran reported that research showed that Unifirst was a good value for the highway department uniforms. We are now using Unifirst again after leaving for a decade or so over quality and cleaning issues.

The Meriden Town Hall sign was returned by the Cornish Police Department, I was directed to make changes to the sign so that it couldn't be stolen again. I have absolutely no recollection of the incident, but I must have done a good job, because it hasn't been stolen again.

May 2nd 1990: Highway completed the first of what have now been four expansions of the Plainfield elementary school parking lot. At that time town offices were located in the front of the original school building. Those were fun times and the relationship between the town function and the school function has never been closer than during the period 1973-1995. Sharing essentially the same office space necessarily kept a lot of lines of communication open. The town and school interacted on a daily basis.

A detailed discussion about the cost of ambulance coverage occurred. You'd think the ambulance provider would pay the town for the rights to cover it, since the real money is billing your insurance company for the ride to the hospital. Oh no, we pay for the privilege of being billed. Nothing has changed its still a frustration.

The Selectmen were waiting for estimates for repairs to the Houser Lane bridge. Today it's the Camp Road bridge.

I'd say Steve Taylor was pretty much right, same problems just different days. Maybe next month we can relive the glassing of Whitaker Road, last I knew Judy Dupree, who still lives on Whitaker Road, still had the evidence.

Steve Halleran

News from the Desk of the Town Administrator April 2017

By Stephen Halleran

Bridging the divide: Exhale, I am not referring to the library system or the Plainfield Plain/ Meriden Village thing that a few refuse to let go of, but most don't care about anymore. No, I mean literally bridging the divide from one side of Newton brook to the other. Town bridge 177/096 needs work. The state, as part of its every two years inspection program, just awarded it the Red List designation, meaning it has deficiencies that require it be inspected annually. This is our only true "Red listed" bridge.

The Selectboard has directed Road Agent Richard Collins and I to begin the process of repairing/replacing the Camp Road Bridge so called. If you have ever found yourself under the Camp Road Bridge, we don't need to know why, you are aware that the bridge structure consists of seven 36" deep steel I beams that span 30' from abutment to abutment. The steel is massively oversized for that little bridge. John McNamar tells me he remembers those beams coming from a NHDOT project and building the current bridge as part of his work with the highway crew sometime around 1984. Effectively, the bridge structure is a thirty three year old hand me down that has served the town very well. The steel still has a lot of life, but needs to be cleaned and painted. The bridge deck is something like 250 2x6 20' planks nailed on edge, also very strong. However, the deck is showing some wear and has a tendency to move about a little when a vehicle goes over it. Not move like going to fall away, more like enough rattle to get your attention and make you fully awake. The guard rail on the bridge is junk. Broken and needs to be replaced. The abutments, salvageable but they too need some work, the north one in particular has some erosion at its base, a common enough problem for abutments when water rushes up against them during high flows.

Our initial plan was to rehab the bridge. Pull of the deck, clean and paint those massive beams, repair the abutments, build a new wooden deck, freshen the rail and your done. Maybe \$50,000 to \$75,000. The bridge would be closed most of the summer, but there is another way around and people in the neighborhood understand the need for the work.

Not so fast, the divide shall not be bridged that easily. It turns out to properly prepare the work site to protect the brook, clean the seven beams, prime them and repaint is more than \$125,000! The disposal of the sand and lead paint/rust bits from the cleaning alone is more than \$35,000 in hazardous waste. Plan B consisting of removing the deck, cutting out the steel and replacing it with a new craned into place pre-stressed concrete deck begins to sound like a bargain at \$103,000. That buys you the bridge structure and the travelling deck. You still need the abutment work, rails, etc.

Current thinking is that the project will cost something like \$125,000-\$150,000 and can be done with a fraction of the bridge closed time of the rehab project. Our bridge fund has a balance of \$135,000. So money is tight, but we might still bridge that divide. The work does not have to be done in 2017, a bridge can remain on the red list for years and still function, but the message is clear the work needs to be done.

We of course have other bridges that are slowly deteriorating (aren't we all), the much loved Meriden Covered Bridge, sits on steel beams that will, guess what, need paint. So, it would be nice to get the Camp Road project behind us and begin to ramp up for the next.

All this is still in the preliminary stages and remains influx with much more work to be done. What we know is that this is not a bridge to know where and like all the issues we face as a community, together we can reach the other side. Think spring!

Steve

News From the Town Administrator

By Stephen Halleran

This is the time of the year when we begin to check project results with the annual plan to see how we are doing. Like a budget, the plan is a hope, a best guess and things rarely go exactly as planned. In any case, here we go.

Town Office: The window project is now complete. Almost without exception every window sash in the building, large or small has been removed, repaired and returned with new opening and closing systems along with a new exterior storm. The results are that the building has maintained its historical look and is more energy efficient. The entire project over two years cost about \$30,000, with approximately half of that money coming from two Moose Plate grants. The project is great work by our Energy Committee. A special thank you is due to Michael O'Leary who has taken a leadership role in his project acting as the project manager. Michael has spent a lot of time on MTH windows, thank him when you see him.

The Selectmen have signed a contract with Avitar Associates for the 2018 Revaluation project. This update is the statistical update and does not include a measure and list of all properties. Avitar will be visiting a random sample of our properties to insure that our data is accurate. Their goal is to develop an assessing model for Plainfield that will predict market value as of 4/1/18. This new model will be used for five years. In 2023 another update will occur and that update will include a visit to all properties, just like the 2013 effort. We are seeing the real estate market become more active, this should provide sufficient sales data to Avitar as they develop the model.

Police Department: As recommended by our Finance Committee our police department now includes three Ford Interceptor SUV cruisers. The lease purchases on these vehicles all run together so that every four years we will get three new cars. The vehicles we have now will be in service through the end of 2022. For towns the days of the old Ford Crown Victoria are gone. Plainfield's last one is headed to auction in early October.

The Police Department has made pedestrian safety on Bonner Road a top priority this year. We are at times having two officers, one on each end of Bonner Road, monitoring traffic during the start and end of the school day. If you have ever seen our young students walking along the roadway with backpacks that are bigger than they are or riding bikes to school you know first hand how scary it is when you combine a bunch of late moms and dads rushing their students to school, while they are eating breakfast and checking messages. FYI the Police Department will not be issuing warnings for distracted driving on Bonner Road, its an immediate ticket do not pass go!

At the same time the Selectmen have approved the hiring of our regional planning commission to prepare both short term (do right now projects) as well as long term, more capital intensive, approaches for making Bonner Road safer for pedestrians. Sidewalk and speed tables are in play. Once we have the report back it will be shared with the community for further input and discussion.

Highway Department: Thrasher Road received its wearing course of pavement and Methodist Hill received a shim and overlay this summer. In an attempt to address some neighborhood concerns, a 100' section of Harriman Road was also paved (four way intersection at the top of Methodist Hill). The Camp Road bridge abutment work has been permitted by the state's wetland bureau and the funds have been reserved for the actual bridge deck replacement, likely to occur right after school gets out next June. The abutment work is planned for this month. Knowing that we will use the bridge for most of the next year Highway added some new wood to the deck. While the deck is perfectly safe, it's a little unnerving to watch the individual boards move like the keys of a piano when a car goes over it. The new wood should prevent that and make the bridge a whole lot quieter as well. Camp Road bridge is first followed almost immediately by the replacement of the Ladieu Bridge. That bridge is just a deck replacement project and could well be done next year as well.

Finally, the Road Agent and the Selectmen have begun dissecting the results of our Highway Department study report conducted by Municipal Resources Inc. This report is seen as the Selectboard's first action on the Highway Garage study committee's recommendation that the planning for a new public works facility begin now. In a nutshell, the consultant felt that the highway department is well run; the mix of equipment is about right and our facility while weather tight is very much out of date and not enough of a building to considering renovating. A full replacement is recommended. Now to be clear, the existing garage will continue to serve us well for years to come, but it is time to realize that a new facility is in our future and we should begin planning for it. The consultant also felt that we burden the Road Agent with too much responsibility. He cannot be the mechanic, an equipment operator and steer the largest town department. Returning to a model where we have a dedicated mechanic was recommended. He also felt we need to make sure we are not holding onto equipment too long. Finally, Highway's core function is road maintenance, not road reconstruction. Like most town's we ask our highway department to also be our construction department. This saves cash money, but results in lost time on maintenance. A lot here to think about, again not a lot of wholesale changes are immediately planned, but as opportunity presents itself I am sure the Selectboard and Finance Committee will use the report to strengthen the highway department.

Tax Rate: We hope to have the tax rate set in early October. Early indications from the school are that they turned back more unexpended funds than they had projected to be able to return. This is a very good thing. The town's grandlist has grown by about \$3,000,000 dollars, the bigger the town's tax base the broader the shoulders are to share the tax load. The hope is that the 2018 tax rate will look an awful lot like the 2017 rate. We can hope for less, but any year that property taxes don't increase can't be all bad.

So as you can see there is plenty going on. Why not commit to stopping in at one Selectboard meeting this fall or winter and talking to us about your views on the town and what you'd like to see or not see happen. Anyone that walks in can have a few minutes of the board's time, we work for you. That would help us a great deal. The

Board meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesday's of every month. The first meeting of each new quarter is held at the Plainfield Library all other meetings are typically at MTH. Come see us.

Steve Halleran