

## REPORT FROM THE SELECTMEN'S OFFICE

Town and School elections will be held at the Town Hall on Tuesday, March 12, 2024. The polls will be open from 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM for voting. Candidates for Town and School District offices will be considered. Warrant Articles 4 through 34 will be considered on Saturday, March 16, 2024, at Strafford School commencing at 8:30AM.

The March 2023 Town Meeting was held in the school gymnasium. Attendees witnessed the swearing in ceremony of Strafford's new Police Chief, Randy Young. Departmental budgets were funded and modest appropriations were made to numerous Capital Reserve Funds in anticipation of future capital improvement projects. Articles voted on during the Town Meeting included the approval of a full time paramedic as well as a full time firefighter/advanced EMT. Several proposed appropriations did not appear on the warrant as the Selectmen made use of available Federal/State funding for Capital Improvement projects as permitted by the funding regulations.

The Town accomplished many priorities during 2023 in the key areas of infrastructure, facilities, personnel, and equipment; the results improved the efficiency in service to our community. Following months of weather delays, the long anticipated bridge replacement on Barn Door Gap Road was completed. After an extensive search, the Town was able to purchase a "new to Strafford" backhoe for the Recycling Center and a new police cruiser was added to the fleet. Cost saving LED lighting was installed and the technology upgrade was completed at the Town Hall. The Fire Department filled the two positions approved at Town Meeting and the Police Department hired a new officer. These hirings help support the increased demands on each department.

Also completed in 2023 was Strafford's Master Plan. Its completion came after more than a year of community engagement and priority setting and will guide planning and management of the Town in the coming years. The Master Plan tells a story about how a community became what it is today, and lays out a vision for what it would like to be in the future. The vision captures the essence and the Select Board's perspective in leading the Town.

*"Strafford values its distinct rural character and small-town community look and feel. We want Strafford to grow in a way that protects and enhances our natural, cultural, and recreational resources, especially Bow Lake. We envision a thriving small and home business centric economy, robust community services and programs that serve all ages, and expanded housing opportunities that are broadly affordable to all."*

In 2023, the municipal tax portion for Strafford was set at \$3.19. This is only 17% of the overall tax rate. The 2024 operating budget was carefully scrutinized, acknowledging that each decision we as Selectmen make has a direct impact on the Town's tax rate. As Strafford continues to grow, the need for emergency services provided by the Town does as well. Your participation at Town Meeting is essential in the successful operation of our Town.

In 2024, residents will be greeted by someone new at the Tax Collector's window. Judy Dupré, who has faithfully served in that position for 27 years, will be retiring. Judy has fulfilled the often unenviable role of Tax Collector with compassion, grace and good humor. Over these years, we have witnessed many a disgruntled taxpayer leave her window with a smile. Best wishes in your retirement, Judy! You will be missed!

The Selectmen meet every other Tuesday at 6:00 PM at the Town Hall, unless otherwise posted. Residents are welcome and encouraged to attend any meeting of the Select Board and other boards which meet throughout the month. Dates and times are posted on the Town website [www.trafford.nh.gov](http://www.trafford.nh.gov). The Town website is managed by Town Clerk Terri Marsh and is the best and most reliable source for election and all Town related information.

In conclusion, the Board wishes to express their gratitude for the Town's employees and volunteers as they continue to provide exceptional services to our community. Our Town is steeped in local control and relies heavily on citizen volunteers. Strafford is a community of neighbors. We all have a role in keeping the divisive political climate out of Strafford. Whether it is a decision from the Selectmen, Planning or Zoning Board, or Town Meeting, we must respect the process and respect differing opinions to ensure that all of our residents remain willing to serve for the betterment of our Town. To all of you, we offer our gratitude and sincere thanks for striving to make Strafford a wonderful place to live.

*Lynn M. Sweet, Chairman ~ R. Chris Garcia, Selectman ~ Brian J. Monahan, Selectman*