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October 31, 2019

The Durham Town Council  
Durham, New Hampshire 03824

Re: **Administrator's Proposed 2020 Operational & Capital Budgets**  
**Administrator's Proposed 2020-2029 Capital Improvement Plan**

Dear Honorable Members of the Council:

I am pleased to present for your review and consideration the Administrator's proposed 2020 Budget, which includes the General Fund, Water Fund, Sewer Fund, Library Fund, Parking Fund, Depot Road Lot Fund, Churchill Rink Fund, and Downtown TIF Fund budgets, as well as the Administrator's proposed 2020-2029 Capital Improvement Plan incorporating the FY 2020 Capital Fund budget utilizing a ten-year time horizon. The proposed budget allocates limited resources and supports funding for targeted initiatives consistent with Town Council goals, to the extent I have been able to responsibly do so while still meeting the budgetary needs of departments in order to safely and reliably meet the basic needs of the Durham community based on historical levels of service delivery. It is generally intended to be a steady state budget to ensure our operations remain ready to accomplish needed tasks as efficiently and effectively as possible for a community of our size and demographics, and taking into consideration the reality that Durham hosts UNH, the State of New Hampshire's flagship public university.

As is the case each year, the development of the proposed budget was part and parcel of a rigorous, yet inclusive process. The Business Manager and I have evaluated (and modified as necessary on multiple occasions) each budgetary line item utilized by the municipality in an effort to assure ourselves, and thereby the Council and the community, that requests are justified and reflect meaningful efforts on the part of our boards, committees, commissions, trustees, and departments, as well as our various external partners, to accomplish the broader goals and objectives articulated by the Town Council and the community as a whole. Our effort was intended to eliminate unnecessary requests altogether, identify and take advantage of new efficiencies where possible and align spending to the extent possible with the 2019-2020 (and beyond) Town Council goals thereby allowing the Council to focus its limited time on broader policy issues impacting the overall community.

Business Manager Gail Jablonski and I have worked with Assessor Jim Rice concerning the projected future assessed valuation for Durham in 2020. After many discussions and much analysis, we're projecting \$26 million in new value (\$20 million from the ongoing installation of Eversource Seacoast Reliability Project infrastructure). For comparative purposes, between 2008-2012, we saw average annual valuation increases

around \$6 million. During the recent development experienced in town over the past few years between 2014-2017, we saw average annual increases of \$28 million. It was new development that allowed Durham to keep the local/municipal portion of the tax rate flat for four years in a row.

General Fund revenues are down by about \$66,000 from what was projected for 2019, representing an impact to revenue for 2020. Costs for managing our parking program and credit card fee processing for the downtown parking kiosks are up yet we have increased parking fees in attempt to offset this trend. Revenue projections continue to include an annual \$140,000.00 payment from UNH to compensate the community for the University's financial impact upon the Town in the area of policing services, plus certain actual roadway costs associated with the upkeep and maintenance/resurfacing of Main Street running through the UNH campus between Pettee Brook Lane and the Rt. 155A intersection (approx. \$50,000/yr.). UNH also supports 50% of the Fire Department operational and capital budgets, 2/3 of the cost of joint water and wastewater capital projects, and a pro rata (rolling 36 mo. average) share of the shared water and wastewater operating budgets for Durham and UNH (currently at 59.3% UNH and 40.7% Durham for Water; and 58% UNH and 42% Durham for Wastewater). These and other revenue numbers are generally enhanced by a projected \$374,000 per year in new monies from our PILOT with Riverwoods Durham (\$550,000 payment minus Riverwoods Durham's bond payment for water/wastewater utility extensions est. at \$176,000), which began in 2019. The Riverwoods PILOT payments to Durham will increase annually over the next several years.

Budgetary projections take into account revenue, limited growth in the tax base combined with projected Seacoast Reliability Project revenue impacts, setting Overlay at \$125,000 to address potential abatement requests, no projected use of fund balance, and recommended expenditures. Proposed expenditures for 2020 are up by \$514,200 over 2019, even given the fact that numerous items have been cut that I believed should have ideally been included for funding in 2020. (Note, for comparative purposes, the proposed budget for 2019 included an expenditure increase of \$505,830.) Cutting more would result in ill-advised impacts to our operations. Due to these various factors, I do not believe it possible to responsibly bring the Council a proposed budget holding the local municipal rate constant for 2020, while also meeting other Council goals and my responsibility under the Charter to ensure the departments (and the Town) are prudently operated.

In the end, three factors impact the tax rate: **spending** (carefully designed to meet goals/community programming expectations), **revenue** (through user fees, grants, motor vehicle registrations, permits, etc.), **assessed valuation** (derived through new development, new construction, or changing real estate market conditions). If spending goes up and revenue plus increased valuation cannot offset those increases, the tax rate must go up. Unless new revenue sources or additional means of financing the requirements of NH local government can be found, this burden will continue to increase for Durham property owners, especially amidst a general environment of downshifted costs from the state, additional Federal regulations, and limited revenue streams available to New Hampshire municipalities.

As I note annually, significant progress continues to be made in our collective efforts in making Durham a better place in which to live, work, raise a family, enjoy numerous tracts of conserved land, and play. We have endeavored to spend the taxpayers' money wisely and have provided the maximum number of desired services possible within the limited constraints of the Town budget. Every effort continues to be made to stabilize the cost of the various services the municipality provides. Like many other communities throughout the state, the tax rate is significant and places a particularly heavy burden on the property taxpayer, particularly those on a fixed income.

A primary driver within Durham's municipal budget is personnel-related costs that accounts for 62.50 % of total spending as part of the proposed 2020 budget.

### **Fiscal Year 2020 Budgetary Proposal**

This year's budget cycle has resulted in a proposed 2020 General Fund budget totaling \$16,635,510 -- a spending increase of \$514,200 or 3.2% compared to FY 2019. Increases are due to required wages and benefits as a result of collective bargaining contracts, a 2% COLA for non-union personnel, insurance increases, debt service costs, and other miscellaneous requests that will be discussed as part of the upcoming process. Non-property tax revenues are expected to decrease in FY 2020 by approx. \$66,000 or .09% to \$7,159,875.

***In total, this year's budgetary proposal is projected to increase the 2020 local municipal portion of the tax rate by 4.19% from \$ 7.60 to \$7.92, an increase of 32 cents. The tax rate had remained at \$7.37 (formerly \$8.48 but adjusted due to 2018 statistical revaluation update) for 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018. The proposed increase would cost the average Durham property taxpayer with a home valued at \$350,000 an additional \$112.00 in taxes for 2020.***

The proposed Sewer (Wastewater) Fund budget reflects a 2.92% increase in user fees in 2020 (a rate of \$8.97 per hundred cubic feet), while the proposed Water Fund budget carries an anticipated 3.8% increase in user fees (a rate of \$7.35 per hundred cubic feet) for FY 2020.

The twelve-month September 2018 to September 2019 Consumer Price Index (CPI-U) numbers are: U.S. City Index – 1.7%, New England – 1.8%, and Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH – 1.1%

Budget highlights include the following, which in addition to the voluminous budget and CIP documents, I am hopeful the Council and the community will carefully review, to ensure their satisfaction with this proposal and the many hard choices made within.

1. This proposal includes \$404,120 in fixed compensation increases for full time wages.
2. A sum of \$7,500 is included within the Public Works budget for part-time 9 hr./wk. enhanced facility maintenance at the Durham Public Library.

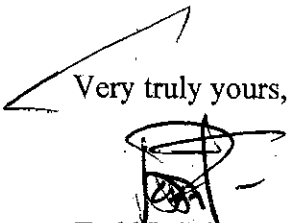
3. \$50,000 was cut from the Town's Contingency line, bringing this item to a proposed budget of just \$100,000 or .6% of the Town's General Fund budget. Historically we have targeted 1%.
4. \$82,000 requested by the Fire Department to enhance training capabilities has been cut due to funding constraints. The Council may have an interest in exploring further.
5. \$6,000 has been budgeted to contract the services of NH Listens per the recommendation of the Durham Winter Celebration Committee to engage the community in a conversation about holiday celebration/displays in the downtown core.
6. \$10,000 has been included to purchase new TBD festive lighting decorations for Main Street to replace the existing holiday wreaths per the request of the Council.
7. While Durham is more resilient than many communities across NH, more can and should be done locally to make the town more resilient in the face of a changing climate. In this endeavor, there is a great deal of opportunity and benefit in continuing to do so in collaboration with UNH. While the opportunities are numerous, the resilience assessment undertaken this summer suggests some immediate actions: a) Work with the UNH Sustainability Institute to complete municipal and community greenhouse gas emissions inventories; b) Adopt new procurement standards; c) Hire a sustainability coordinator; d) Consider additional strategies to raise money to address stormwater concerns; e) and Join the Global Covenant of Mayors, a coalition of cities that are working to cut GHG emissions and adapt to climate change. To this end, the FY 2020 proposed budget will include approximately \$13,000 in funding to work with the UNH Sustainability Fellowship Office to bring on a Graduate Student for the summer/fall 2020 semesters (with the intent of expanding to the full academic year in 2021) to continue/drive forward our sustainability efforts in Durham.
8. \$4,000 is included to support the cost of either a dynamic speed sign or a LED crosswalk sign package for a TBD location.
9. Because we do not have the results of the facility assessments for either the Wagon Hill Farm farmhouse or the Old Town Hall/Courthouse, funds are not included to make significant improvements to either facility in 2020. Once such reports are received, we will have to plan for the future. Limited funding is included for minor improvements/repairs in both facilities to carry us through to 2021 as necessary.
10. Operating under the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Churchill Rink is currently cared for by a seasonal manager with all operating expenses funded by revenues generated at the facility. To remain self-sufficient requiring no taxpayer dollars (beyond ancillary DPW support as is the case with all Town facilities) to sustain the operation, the rink "rents ice" to many different user groups on an hourly basis and also offers "open to the public" fee-based sessions throughout the season. Long-discussed plans for upgrades to the facility to ensure its viability for the future, eliminate operational and safety challenges, and make dry-floor, off-season use feasible after years of very limited activity during spring, summer, and fall due to unfavorable building conditions are included as part of this proposal. The plan also includes establishing a full-time manager position on a trial basis to plan for and oversee improvements and then to operate the facility year-round once the work is

- complete with dry-floor programming during the off-season. The ability to use the facility for recreational and other programming when not being utilized for ice-based activities would be a tremendous benefit to the community. CIP Projects have been proposed in 2020 for \$875,000, 2021 for \$300,000 and 2021 for \$400,000 with funding for all to come from revenues generated at the rink covering debt service.
11. Consistent with the Council's decision to move forward with a GIS initiative as part of the approved FY 2019 budget, a full time GIS Manager position is budgeted to begin 7/1/20. As you recall, \$170,000 was included (\$100,000 – IT, \$70,000 – Assessing) to develop an accurate GIS base layer for Durham and associated tax map layer in GIS over a three-year period.
  12. This budget continues to include \$12,000 to cover the cost of an historical 15% discount for Durham residents off the cost of a UNH pool pass.
  13. This budget includes a \$28,000 tax funded subsidy for the Oyster River Youth Association for a second year in a row to offset the cost of participation for Durham, Lee, and Madbury youth. The Town had supported \$42,745 in 2018 and ORYA has requested \$72,900 in 2020.
  14. \$45,000 has been included to cover the cost of a replacement police vehicle in 2020, cut from the two vehicles that were requested. In 2021, two to three vehicles will be necessary.
  15. \$445,000 is included for roadway resurfacing in 2020 with cash to include shimming and a 1" overlay for the following roadways: Carriage Way, Maple Street, Meadow Road, Riverview Road, Riverview Court, Sandy Brook Drive, Strout Lane, and Surrey Lane.
  16. Sidewalk work recommended for 2020 has been deferred to see what happens with Mill Plaza, etc.
  17. \$15,000 has been added to the Administrator's budget consultant line for bike/pedestrian/traffic safety analysis/enhancements on an as needed basis with offsetting revenue coming from the \$35,227 in the reserve account from the Municipal Transportation and Improvement Fund.

The FY 2020 budget is a basic budget proposal intending to ensure municipal operations remain in conformance with Town Council goals while also meeting the ongoing daily needs of the community. There are few innovations/enhancements, yet those that are noted are believed to be important for the community. Details associated with the budget can be found within this FY 2020 budget book, the 2020-2029 Capital Improvement Program document, or within a separate informational booklet being prepared by the Business Office that will offer some high-level analysis concerning the proposal for Town Council and community information.

I look forward to talking more with the Council concerning the FY 2020 proposed budgets and the proposed 2020-2029 Capital Improvement Program.

Very truly yours,



Todd I. Selig  
Administrator

Enclosures