



FAIRLEE NEWSLETTER

January 2016

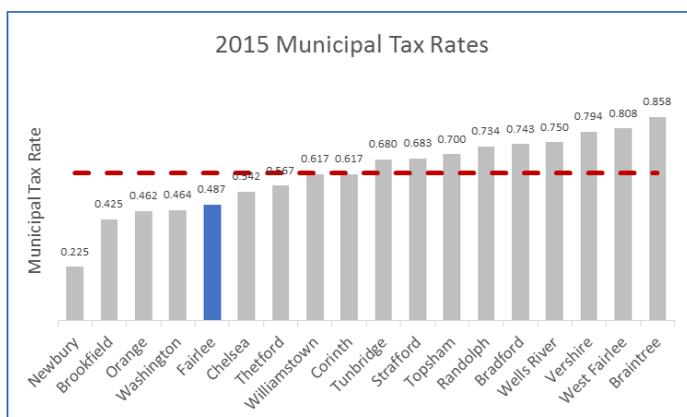
PROPOSED 2016 TOWN BUDGET

In the last two months, the Fairlee Selectboard has worked with departments, commissions, Town staff, and the elected Budget Committee to craft a proposed 2016 budget. This newsletter provides a preview of the proposed 2016 budget. **Please join us at Selectboard Meetings on Monday evenings at 6 PM in the Grange Room, and at Town Meeting on March 1 at 10 AM at the Samuel Morey School Gymnasium.** We invite you to view the budget in February, either in the Town Report (mailed to your residence) or on the Town's website (www.fairleevt.org).

The Selectboard believes that this is a watershed budget. It adequately supports "better people and better management systems" that will help us avoid the financial peaks and valleys that arise from a lack of systematic planning and inattention to detail. The proposed budget is proactive, yet it reacts to what the Selectboard has heard from residents, local businesses, and taxpayers. Certainly we must fill potholes and replace aged water pipes, and we have an honorable history of funding a 4th of July parade and lifeguards at the Town Beach. Yet our budget should do more than cover operational needs. It is built upon our community's short term and long term needs, and it should nurture and fuel the vitality and energy of our community.

The budget that is proposed for 2016 is a movement towards gaining control of our financials, catching up on deferred maintenance, and endorsing residents, business owners and taxpayers hopes for Fairlee's future. It is a stepping stone towards our vision of Fairlee five, ten, and twenty-five years from today.

Our 2015 municipal tax rate, 0.487, was below the Orange County average of 0.6198. **Our 2016 budget has an estimated tax rate of 0.5402**, change driven in part by the need to address deferred expenses.



PROFESSIONAL STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

The people that you've elected to municipal positions, boards, and commissions, along with the volunteers who step up to address the Town's needs, are Fairlee's "human capital." Their names fill three pages of each year's Town Report, ranging from **Auditors** to the **Forest Board**, from the **Recreation Council** to the **Trustees of the Public Library**, from the **Development Review Board (DRB)** to the **Planning Commission**, and from **Health Officer** to **Cemetery Commissioners**. They are the Town's "worker bees," its civil servants, and the shoulders upon which we stand. There are more than a dozen individuals paid from the Town budget. Nearly all work less than 40 hours per week, and some staff have worked for the Town for more than 20 years.

To determine 2016 wages, the Selectboard first identified changes that might affect the number of hours each staff member works each week. Because of the value of our staff, we next compared their wages with those in similar towns throughout Vermont, believing that Fairlee's hourly rates should be neither at the top nor the bottom of the ranked list, but instead in the upper half. As a result, the Selectboard has proposed hourly wage increases ranging from 1.5 percent to 3 percent. Additionally, and at the encouragement of staff, the Selectboard began a conversation about benefits, and have approved an Empower Retirement deferred compensation opportunity beginning in 2016, a benefit which will be of no cost to Town taxpayers.

DEFERRED EXPENSES

Deferred expenses don't disappear. They haunt us, occasionally surprising us as overflowing culverts, cracked water lines, and emergencies with higher price tags than they would have had should the Town have previously invested in systematic maintenance and replacement. **The proposed 2016 budget has "bump ups" from prior years to catch up on deferred maintenance.**

At the request of the Finance Committee, it was the unanimous agreement of the Selectboard to create more effective short and long term budgeting processes. As a first step, the Town has purchased computer software that allows Road Contractor **Mike Wright** and Town Administrator **Brian Hanson** to more closely monitor highway infrastructure and

expenditures, and in turn lead to more proactive and cost-effective maintenance and budgeting.

NEW ZONING OFFICE

Fairlee is at a tipping point. The Selectboard is listening to taxpayers from all corners of the Town as they express concerns about economic development, the characteristics of Main Street, and aspects of our land use laws and regulations. In our public discussion with village business and property owners in August, in weekly Selectboard meetings, and in responses to the Planning Commission's survey, we find ourselves in the midst of vigorous conversations about Fairlee's vitality.

To begin to address these important concerns, the Selectboard has **reorganized and increased our investment in zoning and planning functions** (including DRB and Planning Commission resources). In order to have more fully engaged and well trained professional staff, **Chris Brimmer's** position, which currently involves serving as our zoning administrator and providing support to the DRB and Planning Commission, has been expanded from 25 hours per week to 30 hours.

While you will begin to see the impact of increased zoning and planning resources this year, our investment is one that is best measured against a longer term. We expect the investment to have significantly positive returns over the course of three, five, and ten years—it is the beginning of an effort which, over time, will yield solid and important results.

CAPITAL BUDGET

The Town's capital budget is our savings account. It includes funds that can be carried from one year to the next for professional audits, large scale highway work,

and cyclic milfoil treatments.

Additions to the capital budget total \$252,333, with anticipated 2016 expenditures of \$153,028. Capital budget additions include \$150,000 for repaving and highway rebuilding, \$75,000 to re-roof the Town Hall, \$10,000 to purchase a police cruiser, and \$2,500 to beautify Main Street with landscaping and trees.

GRANTS

The Selectboard and Town staff are committed to applying for as many state and federal grants as possible, to ensure that what we pay in state and federal taxes comes back to serve our local needs.

- **Jason Bachus** has written 3 grants since 2014. His work has led to Homeland Security grants totaling \$14,377.
- **Chris Brimmer** has written and submitted 2 grants since July. To date, his work has culminated in grants totaling \$37,100 from the Department of Housing and Community Affairs and VTrans.
- **Brian Hanson** has written and submitted 2 grants since April. His work has resulted in a grant of \$10,000 from Better Back Roads and a Highway Class 2 Roadway Program grant of \$30,000.

A number of departments have grant income as revenue. These grants don't magically appear. They are the result of the work of Town staff, and are clearly one of the key benefits of having strong human capital.

FAIRLEE SELECTBOARD

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Peter Berger	selectboardvicechair@fairleevt.org
Cathy McGrath	selectboardmember@fairleevt.org

Fairlee Selectboard
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75 Town Common Road, P.O. Box 95
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Town Meeting
Tuesday, March 1 at 10 AM
Samuel Morey Gymnasium