

REPORT OF THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

2003 looked much like 2002 as it pertained to the town's financial health. Further cuts in state aid due to continued economic pressure on the state caused the second straight annual reduction in state aid to cities and towns. Through the use of the town's free cash and approximately \$600,000 from the town's stabilization fund, the town was able to agree on a budget that, while painful, does not devastate the town's service base. This will become more difficult to achieve in future years without a reasonable annual increase in state aid in future fiscal years.

This past year brought some staffing changes to the town government. Some of the changes of note included the promotion of Jean Bouchard to the position of Assistant to the Town Administrator and adding Elaine Weston to the office staff to replace Pat Clarke who retired this past year. In addition, the town lost the services of our very fine town accountant Jennifer Petit who accepted the position of Finance Director for the Town of Chatham. We were very fortunate to be able to replace her with John Adams, who brings a stellar resume and understanding of local finance that includes experience as both a town accountant and municipal auditor.

In addition to the town's fiscal challenge we have worked hard to deal with the soaring cost of health insurance. We have been successful in moving a large number of our employees to more cost effective health plans that provide better coverage. Maria Gomes has spearheaded this effort and continues to work to save the precious dollars in the area of health insurance and other fixed costs. We look forward to exploring even more cost saving opportunities in the coming year.

Similar to 2002 it has been my privilege to assist the Board of Selectmen in their continued efforts to bring about the necessary change in the Police Department as well as to assist their efforts to deal with the age-old concern of the North Carver Landfill. Both key initiatives have been moving methodically in a positive direction that will continue into 2004.

I would like to compliment the town's employees and extremely capable department heads for their efforts during this past year. I would also like to express my appreciation to the public for the patience and understanding exhibited during this year of staffing shortages and part-time offices. Unfortunately, it can be easy to forget that staffing issues can cause a true hardship and inconvenience for citizens who expect a certain level of service.

As always I wish to thank the Jean Bouchard for continuing to go "beyond the call of duty" in managing the day to day affairs of the Selectmen's Office, and, Maria Gomes and Elaine Weston for their imagination and tenacity in forwarding the goals of the Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator.

Respectfully Submitted,

Richard J. LaFond
Town Administrator