

# TOWN MANAGER

Stephen Crane, Town Manager

This is my 11th annual report as a municipal administrator, the second as Concord Town Manager and, by far, the most challenging I have ever had to write. 2020 began normally enough, then Town staff began talking about this mysterious illness emerging in Asia and watched with horror as it began to devastate Europe. Like a levy breaking, COVID-19 hit the US swiftly and overwhelmingly. Just days into the State of Emergency, it was clear that Concord would not be spared from its effects. In many ways, Concord was aware of the threat but, like most communities, was unprepared for how quickly it descended. The Town made the decision to close non-essential Town operations on Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup> 2020 in anticipation of the Governor's order the following week. On that day, there were 15 licenses for remote access to the Town network; by March 17 there were a 125 along with a plan to deploy laptops to those who needed them and the purchase of the Town's first Zoom license.

In the early days of the pandemic, the demands on municipal employees, especially first responders, grew exponentially as uncertainty about the virus and the future deepened. Guidance about masks, surface spread of the virus, and what defined "close contact" were all new frontiers that required constant attention and seemed to change daily, if not more frequently. Employees, along with boards and committees, had to learn new ways to work in real time. The analogy of "building the airplane in midair" was used often but always seemed to capture the feeling.

Despite the rapidly shifting forces affecting daily life, Town departments provided full services even though Town buildings were closed to the public to prevent the spread of the virus. Notably, the Town Clerk's Office issued marriage licenses through curbside service, which became very popular, while managing major changes to election procedures—resulting in robust voter turnout via both mail-in

ballots and in-person voting. The Library introduced its own curbside service that also remained very popular during the year. The closure to the public did allow for the start of a long-planned renovation to the first floor of the Town House.

In March of 2020, the Select Board declared a local State of Emergency that mirrored the State of Emergency declared by the Governor. It was a State of Emergency unlike any other and the Town committed at the very beginning to adhere to the emergency orders promulgated by the Governor. One of the immediate results was the cancellation of most community events and traditions. Among the notable events lost to the pandemic in 2020 include the Patriots Day Parade and Dawn Salute, Ag Day, Jazz Fest, Easter Egg hunt, Picnic in the Park, and the Holiday tree lighting/parade. As the year progressed, some events became virtual programs as more aspects of daily life occurred on a screen. The new virtual work environment included new challenges for the Town to address including unknowns risks to the Town's network security and threats of "Zoom bombing," when people enter virtual public meetings shouting or displaying inappropriate content. Fortunately, Town staff did a great job protecting both meetings and the network.

Another result of the changes made to comply with the emergency orders was the delay of the Annual Town Meeting from April 22<sup>nd</sup> to September 13<sup>th</sup>. The FY21 Town Budget was prepared and presented at a public hearing in February but needed to be revised significantly to reflect the impact of the pandemic on the local economy. Moreover, the four nights that were planned for the Town Meeting in April were consolidated into one afternoon and was moved from the CCHS gym to the Doug White Fields (fortunately the weather cooperated).

In addition to conducting Town business in new ways, town businesses also had to adapt to rapidly changing conditions and endure lost revenues,

increased costs, and the stress of an uncertain future. The Town government collaborated with community stakeholders to create new ways of supporting local businesses including outdoor dining, sidewalk sales, discount cards, and online advertising. The spirit of cooperation between the Town and the business community helped mitigate some, but certainly not all, of the pandemic's economic impact.

Finally, at the end of 2020, the Town worked with 5 other communities to establish a regional clinic to vaccinate first responders. The clinic, which was set up at CCHS, help protect public health and safety workers and marked an important shift toward ending the pandemic and a better 2021.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

The Information Technology department's mission is threefold:

1. To provide both strategic technology vision and leadership to the Town of Concord
2. To provide secure, reliable information systems and technology to support all Town entities
3. To work with all departments and enterprises to support and improve business functions through the adoption and advancement of technology.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic expedited the adoption of remote work policies and development of infrastructure to support them. The IT Department deployed new or repurposed laptops to several dozen staff members for use at home while they were unable to be in Town buildings. Additional upgrades, from firewalls and VPN appliances to bandwidth enhancements, allowed these employees to keep working during this difficult time.

This was also the year that online permitting rolled out for several departments, beginning with the Board of Health. Applicants and contractors can now, from the convenience of their homes and offices, conduct this business entirely online while tracking the workflow and progress of each permit. We continue to add additional departments and expect to have full adoption by Spring of 2021.

The Town of Concord maintains approximately 80 servers in support of operations, and steps are underway to consolidate these where possible and move many to the cloud, where economies of scale and carbon-neutral datacenters can save the town money and contribute toward the community's goal of embracing sustainability.

Concord GIS (Geographic Information Systems) began offering Nearmap® web-based aerial imagery, updated three times per year and deployed via a variety of web-based maps published directly from our ArcGIS Server. This provides the public with access to the latest imagery and data about the Town: parcel ownership, polling stations, natural resources, recreation and much more. Concord GIS also supported major business information infrastructure upgrades by integrating GIS data into the NISC

(utility billing, accounting, engineering, and operations) and PermitEyes (licensing and permitting) projects.

Security continues to be an area of supreme concern as malicious actors increasingly see state and local governments as easy targets for network penetration and ransomware. Through the adoption of policies, greater end-user training and additional security software, we aim to reduce our attack surface and increase our detection and reporting of anomalous events. This work is paying off as more Town staff have swift and direct communication when they suspect something is not right, leading to an immediate investigation. The Town is currently implementing both a Risk Committee and a Cyber Incident Response Team to assist with these security-focused policies. The pandemic had a large impact on the technology needs and helpdesk ticket counts town-wide. Instead of usual break/fix requests, the department spent much more time scaling up infrastructure to support remote work needs, deploying laptops, adjusting VPN access and reconfiguring software to be more widely accessible. Support ticket volume showed reductions from March through October, but has gradually increased at the end of the year. Nearly 4,000 tickets were managed by internal staff and our managed service provider partner.

In addition to supporting operations and staff, we always welcome collaboration, input and feedback from citizens. Feel free to look up our contact details on the Town website to get in touch.

## PUBLIC INFORMATION

Erin Stevens, Public Information and Communications Manager (PICM)



*Members of the Concord Minutemen completed a photo shoot to encourage public mask wearing during the pandemic.*

The Public Information Office is tasked with communicating with the public and helping to make information both easier to find and communicated in more useful ways for changing lifestyles.

The Public Information Office spent a great deal of 2020 finding new ways to communicate with and keep the community informed on the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 website was set up and updated nearly daily with information updates from the State Department of Public Health, Concord Health Division, Town Manager, Concord Emergency Management, Federal Public Health partners, and more.

More than ever, our communication channels through social media, news and notices, the Town website, Minuteman Media Network local cable, and robocalls were used to try and provide valuable information to the community who was looking for as much information as possible. While many of our more traditional forms of communication methods were useful, the pivoting to a mostly online and virtual world made getting information out in these formats all the more crucial.

Working with various departments, the Public Information Office helped to notify people about

Town building closures, how to get/find services, how to help others, shopping local, and how to keep safe. A lawn sign campaign was coordinated and brought to fruition by the division utilizing photos taken by the PICM and the Concord Mintemen in a costumed and masked photo-shoot in April.

Public Information designed, created, provided photography services and maintained the COA's Harvey Wheeler Gift Shop's new online store providing an additional source of income for the COA and a way for the gift shop to stay 'open' during the pandemic.

The Public Information Office continues to work with various departments, boards and committees, and individuals to get information about the Concord community out to people in creative methods and using creative design.



### *PEG Services*

Community access television, also known as PEG which stands for Public, Education Government, has been provided through Minuteman Media Network (MMN) since October of 2018. Since its inception, MMN has been working hard to provide quality coverage for community events, meetings, and more.

The pandemic drastically shifted the way that MMN operated moving for nearly 5 months to completely remote work. Many of the video postings became almost exclusively recorded zoom meetings. Despite the constraints of the pandemic, the number of recorded board and committee meetings rose to record numbers with the ease of recording meetings through the zoom record feature. With zoom recorded meetings allowing committees to film themselves, the MMN team were able to post

more meetings than ever and work on tasks that had been delayed such as updating of equipment systems and the creation of new file sharing systems to make working together remotely more accessible for the staff.

The MMN team was able to do a full inventory of equipment and practice new skills and editing techniques, making the most out of their limited time in the studio as well as time working remote. During the warmer months and into the fall, the staff began to work doing outdoor interviews and capturing the beauty of Concord and Carlisle for promotional videos and the online bulletin board which can be seen in between scheduled programs.

MMN also was instrumental in this year's outdoor Town Meeting in September. The meeting, which was postponed and held outdoors due to concerns over the coronavirus, was live streamed from the Doug White Field behind the Concord Carlisle Regional High School thanks to the hard work of the MMN team, Facilities Division, CMLP, and our vendors.



# SUSTAINABILITY

Kate Hanley, Sustainability Director

The Town of Concord has a long history of commitment to sustainability. We have ambitious climate and sustainability goals, including reducing community-wide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 80% by 2050 in alignment with the Paris Climate Accord and the Massachusetts Global Warming Solutions Act. Working with town departments, committees, residents, partners and businesses, Concord’s Sustainability Division, led by Director of Sustainability Kate Hanley, is responsible for developing and implementing programs, policies and initiatives to achieve the Town’s climate and sustainability goals.

The most significant milestone of 2020 was the completion of Sustainable Concord, the Town’s first comprehensive climate action and resilience plan. Sustainable Concord is the roadmap for how Concord will take action in the next 5 years to make progress toward our climate goals. It is a

commitment to take 22 climate actions and includes detailed implementation blueprints.

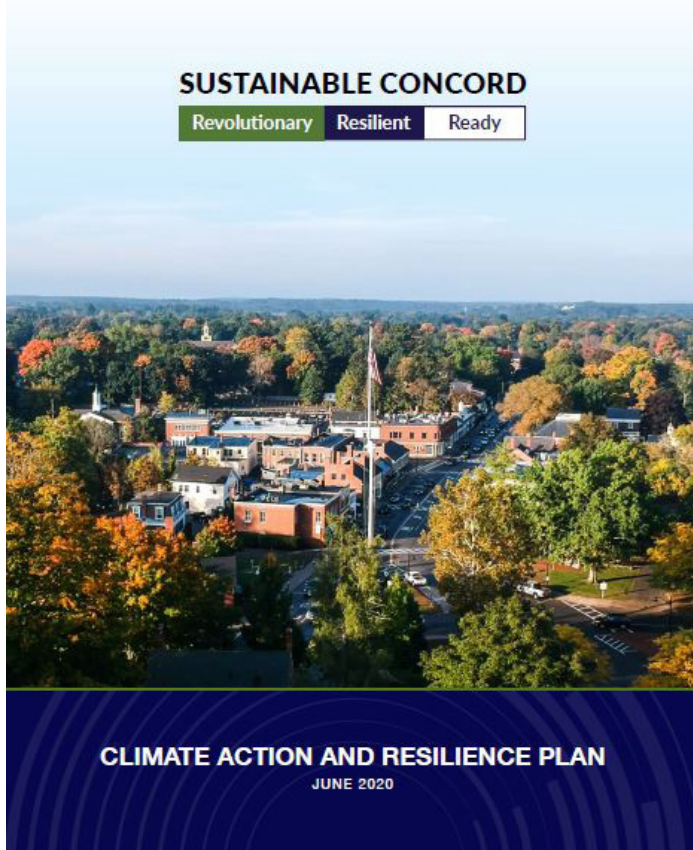
Sustainable Concord was developed through a collaborative process between municipal staff and the community with support from a consultant team courtesy of a grant from state’s municipal vulnerability preparedness (MVP) program. In early 2020, we hosted in-person events and stakeholder meetings, and transitioned to online community engagement in March. Despite the timing of the pandemic, the plan was completed on time and on budget in June of 2020.

In 2020, we also made progress toward implementing some of the priority actions in the Sustainable Concord plan. In October, Concord opted in to the state’s PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) program, a tax based financing mechanism for energy improvements to commercial buildings enabled by state legislation. The program provides commercial property owners access to third-party funds to invest in energy improvements to their property and allows for the funds to be repaid through a betterment assessment on the property tax bill. Opting into PACE will help to provide incentives for businesses to invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

We also took steps to continue to decarbonize and electrify the Town’s vehicle fleet as detailed in the Sustainable Concord plan. The Town continued its efforts to add electric vehicles to the fleet by purchasing several new Nissan Leafs. In partnership with the school department, we also moved forward in purchasing a new electric school bus thanks to a grant funded through the VW settlement.

Implementing another step from the plan, Concord adopted an electric-first vehicle policy in December of 2020. The Select Board adopted APP 65 Sustainable Fleet Policy requiring new town vehicle purchases to prioritize electric options. It maintains fuel efficiency standards for conventional vehicles as well as requires other greenhouse gas reduction strategies, such as minimizing idling, for the town’s vehicle fleet.

In 2020, the Sustainability Division also continued to expand and enhance community outreach and



communications around sustainability. The division oversaw release of two sustainability resources for Concord residents. Your Sustainable Home Now! is a brochure created by the Comprehensive Sustainability and Energy Committee (CSEC) in partnership with several town departments. It highlights a full range of actions that Concord residents can take at home, and rebates and incentives to support those, to create a more sustainable future.

The Sustainability Division also collaborated with the Department of Planning and Land Management to release a Sustainability Guide for Historic and Older Homes. This guide was developed by UNH Sustainability Institute summer fellow, Abigail Ahern, a recent graduate of architecture school. The guide provides practical tips and strategies for improving the sustainability of historic and older homes in Concord.

Following the completion of the Sustainable Concord plan, the Town launched the Sustainable Concord Dashboard. The Dashboard is an interactive, online platform that allows residents to review priority actions in the climate action and resilience plan, see progress on those actions, and engage with Concord-specific climate data. The dashboard also features a blog with monthly posts about sustainability topics. The Dashboard complements a Sustainable Concord monthly newsletter that was also launched in 2020.

The Sustainability Division continued and expanded its partnership with Concord Free Public Library in 2020 by participating in Climate Preparedness Week for the second time and joining a planning committee for a library sustainability plan. Climate Preparedness Week is a national effort to raise awareness of the impacts of climate change on communities. This year, we hosted virtual events, featuring a movie discussion, storytimes for children, and a well-received presentation by two Climate Reality Leaders, including Concord resident Keith Bergman, titled The Climate Reality and How To Talk to Your Kids About It.

Sustainability is a team effort and Sustainability Director Kate Hanley collaborates and engages with many town departments. Kate is the staff liaison to

two committees, the Comprehensive Sustainability and Energy Committee and the Climate Action Advisory Board, and serves on the Concord Middle School Building Committee. The Sustainability Division looks forward to continued collaboration in 2021 to create a more sustainable and resilient Concord.

## **FACILITIES DEPARTMENT**

Ryan Orr, Director

### **Responsibilities**

Centralizing the management of Concord facilities began in January 2016. This effort has provided better oversight of how Concord maintains its 41 public buildings. Responsibilities include custodial services, building maintenance and repairs, landscaping, support of capital projects and day-to-day project management for new construction and major renovations. The goal of the department is to maintain healthy, comfortable buildings and productive environments for all who work in and use our facilities. The staff consists of eight full-time and one part time skilled technicians, Facilities Director, Facilities Coordinator and Facilities Administrator. The Facilities management and administrative staff develops and implements the programs that provide services for the Town buildings. In addition, the Facilities Capital Budget is managed by the Facilities staff. Building maintenance budgets were historically funded for individual departments. Beginning in FY21, these budgets were transferred to the Facilities Department, creating a centralized building maintenance budget.

### **COVID-19**

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced all town departments to rethink how to protect the public, staff and maintain operations. The primary role of the Facilities Department in dealing with COVID-19 is to create a safe work environment. Working with the Town Manager's Reopen Task

Force, the Facilities team developed recommendations on operational and workplace changes required because of COVID-19. An evaluation was made of janitorial schedules, daily cleaning practices, spot sterilization, and workplace-specific sanitization standards. The custodial staff implemented new practices that increased daily cleaning and added additional disinfecting for each town building. The department was also charged with procuring and distributing PPE, Plexiglas guards, cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing supplies.

Because COVID-19 spreads primarily through airborne droplets, air quality is a major concern. Top-level priorities included the replacement of HVAC filters as well as service and maintenance to ensure efficiency from all systems. Between June and August, our HVAC technician and electrician installed ultraviolet (UV) air scrubbers in all buildings containing air handling and roof top units. In December, Facilities purchased portable air purifiers capable of scrubbing the air and removing contaminants as small as .007 microns including COVID-19 at .1 microns. These units were placed in all Town buildings. Building air quality is safer today than it has ever been.

Another challenge was ensuring Town employees had a means of staying in contact with the public without contaminating any of the buildings. Facilities installed drop boxes and video doorbells at a number of town buildings. The staff also had to determine which workspaces are safe vs. what spaces are not efficient under new social distancing guidelines. In December, Facilities began building vestibules inside 133 and 135 Keyes Road for safer interaction between town employees and the public. During December 2020 and January 2021, Facilities assisted with wiring and general set up of a temporary structure at the Concord Carlisle High School for COVID-19 testing and a vaccination.

### **Projects**

In January 2020, the Facilities team coordinated the refinishing of the historical yellow birch hardwood flooring in the second floor hall of the Town House. The existing carpet was removed. The floor was sanded and finished to match the Hearing Room flooring that was refinished in 2019. The hallway and

Select Board Room were repainted. The project was completed in late February 2020.

In April 2020, The Facilities team completed replacement of roof top units at the Beede Swim and Fitness Center with high efficiency units and an upgraded control system. High efficiency furnaces and heat pump condensers were also installed at 37 Knox Trail in May. Also in May, the team replaced a large walk-in shower in the men's locker room at the Police Department.

Working with CPW Highway and Grounds Division, Facilities replaced the underground water filtration pipes for the Emerson pool. Cutting up the existing pool deck replacing filtration pipe, repairing the pool deck, pressure washing the pool and installing new sod, was completed in June prior to the opening of Concord Recreation Summer Camp.

In mid-June 2020, the Facilities Department completed building an addition to Fire Station 2. Additional space was created for a new gear room. The original gear room is now used for exercise equipment. A new electric heat pump mini split for heating, cooling and dehumidification was added which aids in the drying of equipment after a call. A new electric heat pump hot water heater was also installed.

In January 2021, Facilities completed a build-out of the Visitors Center at 58 Main Street. A staircase was added to access the unfinished second floor. Two large offices, a small meeting room, mechanical room and an employee restroom were built on the second floor. A high efficiency furnace was installed. Repairs were also made to the plumbing and drainage in the public restrooms.

### **Town House Renovation**

In preparation for the first floor Town House renovation project, the Deputy Town Manager, Facilities Director, Facilities Team, Public Information Officer, Sustainability Director and Senior Department Clerk were relocated to 55 Church Street in June. In August, Facilities adjusted the layout, painted and added cubicles to the second floor of 37 Knox Trail to accommodate the relocation of the Town Manager, Finance Department, Accounting Department, Treasury

Department, Senior Administrative Manager, Senior Administrative Assistant and Veterans Services. Following the national election in November, the Town Clerk's Department was relocated to the Harvey Wheeler Community Center. The first floor Town House renovation began in mid-November. This project will create a much-needed rework to the current floorplan allowing for more convenient customer service as well as a safer interaction between the public and Town employees. This remodel will also include two accessible public restrooms on the first floor.

### **Additional Accomplishments**

- Barrett's Mill Farm front roof replaced and plumbing repairs to the apartment bathroom February 2020.
- Marshall Farm septic repair, Furnace replacement and installation of a washer and dryer connection November 2020.
- Roof repair at Police station March 2020.
- Interior painting for the Walden Street Fire Station.
- Assisted with managing the demolition of the existing White Pond Bath Houses May 2020.
- Assisted with the 95% completion of the plans and specifications for the Gerow property park with collaboration and vision of the Deputy Town Manager who also played a major role in seeing this major project come to fruition.

### 2021 Goals

- Full HVAC system replacement at 141 Keyes Road.
- Enhance technical skills of staff by coordinating and scheduling appropriate training courses, and begin monthly OSHA training for staff.
- Continue to assist the Building and Fire Departments with fire and life safety inspections.
- Fire Station 2 Phase 2 renovation.