**TA Update**

*October 15, 2018*

**Committees**

The Highway Garage Committee met for the first time on Tuesday and set its meeting dates for the year, until the annual Town Meeting. The dates are November 6;  Dec. 4; January 15; February 12; and March 12 (all Tuesdays), and the time is 6 p.m. The November 6 meeting will start with a site visit to the garage at 6 p.m., followed by a meeting at 6:30 in the General Purpose Room to discuss the history of the project, the previous plans, and begin re-assessing the project from the beginning, starting with defining the need and the functionality of a facility designed to last for several decades.

**Departments**

Tax bills are slated to go out this week. The Assessor spent a great deal of time with DOR reviewing new information, which, together with a late start on property visits, contributed to missing the original target date of Oct. 1 for the mailing. The good news is that there is substantial new growth, primarily in personal property, and the tax rate is slated to go up only about $0.15, to $18.65/$1,000—the lowest increase in several years. I am not aware of the effect of the revaluation on property values, but we are slated to have an excess levy capacity of about $160,000. While I may propose in my FY2020 budget both a grant match fund and a study for a Town Hall lift, we should maintain fiscal discipline going forward, reserving some excess levy capacity for unforeseen emergencies.

Based on an e-mail from our police and fire injured-on-duty insurer recommending maximum coverage for police and fire injured-on-duty claims, I requested and received a quote for the maximum coverage. We are now paying $11,890 per year; maximum coverage would cost $30,676. Prior to my coming to Conway, we had been paying about $15,000, and I moved us to the MIIA program as a money-saver. While we value our public safety officials greatly, we do not have full-time staff and our risk is lower than many municipalities, so I will continue to recommend the less costly package.

The Treasurer reports that the Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust has realized savings of about $1M on pharmaceutical expenses based on implementing various discounts, which is likely to grow over the next two years. In addition, claims have leveled off, so the Trust is not losing as much money as it was last year when it proposed plan changes. Based on this, Jan does not recommend a plan change at this time.

The Highway Department participated in the annual MMA survey on road and bridge needs as part of their advocacy campaign for Chapter 90 funding. We estimate we get about one-quarter of our needs met, with $264,963 out of $1.1M needed to keep all our roads and bridges in good repair.

I sent out a request for information on conservation agents to surrounding towns. None had one, but Deerfield and Williamsburg expressed possible interest in a shared position. We are sending out a notice for ConCom membership, but really need long-term expertise.