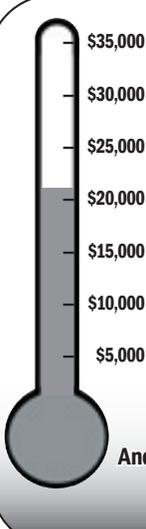


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**at the Andover Library**

Tay was our librarian for 33 years. During that time she managed our collection, initiated programs, and welcomed children and adults to the library. She was a resource for anyone looking for a book or searching for information. Please come and express your love and appreciation to Tay for her many years of service.



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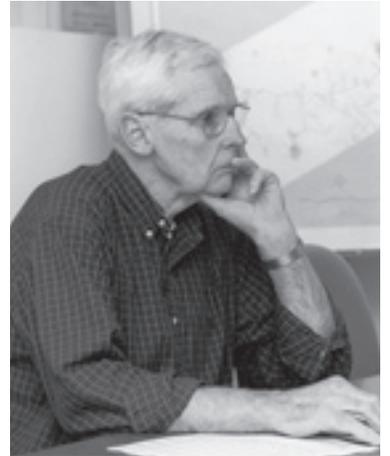
**Andover Recreation Fund**  
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## Dennis Fenton: On Being Or Becoming A Selectman

By Vicky Mishcon  
 Beacon staff

Every city, town, and village requires the good work of people who are willing to serve their community in government, local churches, business, education, and community organizations for all ages. Some of these positions offer a small stipend; most are volunteer.

Dennis Fenton, Chairman of the Andover Board of Selectmen, has been serving the Town of Andover for many years and in many different capacities. In the interview that follows, Dennis shares a little of his family history, his reasons for serving the Town for so many years, and the qualities he feels are helpful in a selectman.



Dennis Fenton. Photo: Bob Bussey

**Andover Beacon:** Dennis, there is a rumor that you might not run again for selectman this March.

**Dennis Fenton:** [smiling] I'll run one more time... but this is the last time.

**AB:** Don't you always say that?

**DF:** [laughing] Yes, but I've had so many people harping at me already that I said, well, OK. My first term as a selectman was in the 1970s and I've been on and off for close to 20 years.

**AB:** Actually, it's closer to 30 years now.

**DF:** I guess you're right!

**AB:** Dennis, the job of selectman seems to be one of the most challenging positions in town government. What made you put your name on the ballot the first time?

**DF:** Well, it was kind of a normal progression for me, because I'd done so many other things. I've been on the Planning Board, the Budget Committee, and the School Board...it seemed like the Board of Selectmen was the next thing to do.

**AB:** You obviously feel it's important to serve the town.

**DF:** It's almost in my heritage. My grandfather started out as a selectman in 1912 – he was Dennis also. My dad spent over 30 years as the Town Moderator, and he was on the School Board for I don't know how many years. My mother was the first chair of the original Planning Board, way, way back, before it was even actually official...back in the '50s. So it just kind of came down through the genes, you know, that you had to try to contribute something if you could.

**AB:** What do you think is the best way to go about learning the job of selectman?

**DF:** Well, I think there are two different ways. There's the way I did it, growing up and spending a lifetime in town. I think today, with the population being a little more transient, a person would need a speeded up version, and I think you could do that in a couple of ways. I think serving on the Budget Committee is a good place to start. That gives you the complete overview, at least of the monetary side of things.

The Planning Board is always good, too, from a town perspective. It's a case

of how much time you have...there's a lot of material you can read, which would allow you to bypass some of this. You can read the zoning ordinances and understand what they do, and study the Town Report.

**AB:** It seems that the same few people do all the work in a community. How can we "hook" more people?

**DF:** I went to my first Town Meeting in 1943. I wish more people would be hooked, on Town Meeting, School District Meeting, all of it, because it's that important. I think way too many of us are willing to say, "Hey, they're getting the job done, and we don't have to worry about it." I think that's absolutely the wrong approach...we need everybody's input.

**AB:** Moving on to the actual work of the Board, can you describe some of the most important aspects of the job?

**DF:** Preparing for Town Meeting is top on the list, and the budget is top priority. One of the things we do, interestingly enough, we sit down and say, "If we were going to go to Town Meeting this year, understanding the agenda and understanding all the warrant articles, what questions would we have? What do we want to know?" We spend many hours anticipating the questions that will come from the floor and making sure we have the information to address all the issues that may come up.

There are also court cases and tax appeals. Lately, we have had to deal with the recent flooding and the need for extensive repairs to the dam on Highland Lake.

**AB:** What qualities should a person have to be successful as a selectman?

**DF:** I think one of the most important things for a selectman to be, is to be a big picture guy. And at the same time I think you've got to throw your ego aside and listen. It doesn't matter whose idea it is but how it fits into the big picture. You know, I might have a personal preference for something, but I can't look at it that way as a selectman.

You have to think where it fits in and how does it best serve the town. And that's hard to do, I don't care who you are. Personal preferences creep in if you're not careful.

I can't stress enough the need to listen  
 See Fenton on page 9

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