News from the Town Office

By Dana Hadley
Andover Town Administrator

As I write a few lines to you on this Monday, September 21, or the last day of summer, I can't help wonder where the summer went, or the few days that it felt like summer.

The recent good weather certainly was a help for the activities of the highway department as they completed their summer work. They are ready for the winter: the salt and sand supply is stocked, and plenty of chains are on hand.

It has been an active year for them. The Maple Street and Chase Hill Road paving projects were completed. Road Agent Jon Champagne and his crew have worked on several maintenance projects over the summer, including cleaning and clearing ditches for good drainage, road grading, patching, and brush cutting.

Most recently, roadside mowing has been accomplished. This is a very important maintenance activity. We understand that there are areas where residents would prefer not to have any cutting done, and the method of marking such areas with ribbons or tape has worked well.

Street Signs

You may have noticed around the Town that the number of missing street signs has increased significantly. I am concerned, as missing signs could result in a serious situation if there is an emergency. Local residents know which street is which, but if an out-of-town emergency responder is responding to an emergency, a missing street sign could cause a problem. It also makes it difficult for our out-of-town friends to find us and is a challenge in giving directions.

I understand that for many years it has been considered a sport to steal or damage street signs, but it is expensive for the town. The road crew took an inventory of missing signs for me earlier in the summer, and we ordered 29 new street signs to replace them. In many cases the pole and the connecting bracket is also missing.

I imagine that most missing signs disappear during the wee hours of the night. I hope that this does not keep happening, as it does run into money. This has been an on-going problem in many communities, so we shouldn't feel targeted, but just the same it is an expensive practice. In the next few weeks the road crew will be working to install the new signs.

Assessments

The assessors are finalizing the figures on the Town's revaluation. They have met with several property owners to hear concerns in regard to the assessment. [For more details about the revaluation, see the article on page 4.]

As in any revaluation, most property owners ask, "How do the updated values affect my tax bill?" The answer is that your property value by itself doesn't determine your tax bill, so just looking at the change in your valuation doesn't tell you what's going to happen to your tax bill. It appears that in most (but not all) cases, the valuation of properties that didn't add any improvements in the last five years went down. But that doesn't mean most people's taxes will go down.

Revenue and expenses are the other big component of your tax bill. The Town budget and the Fire Precinct budgets are comparable to last year; the county budget is down somewhat; and the school budget increased (as talked about at the school district meeting last March). Town revenues have been strong this year, with the exception of the loss of the state shared revenues.

Once the final assessment figures are in and the final amount of revenues that we can offset the tax rate with are in, we can set the tax rate and multiply it by your valuation to determine your tax bill.

Potter Place Bridge

Route 11 at Potter Place has been full of action this summer. The reconfiguration of the access to route 4 north is complete and the DOT has recently been planting shrubs where the former exit ramp was. Work has also begun on the parking lot that will be at Potter Place. This will serve the rail trail for summer and winter use. Plans are for the bridge removal itself to be done next year. I have been impressed how effectively this work has been done on a very busy road.

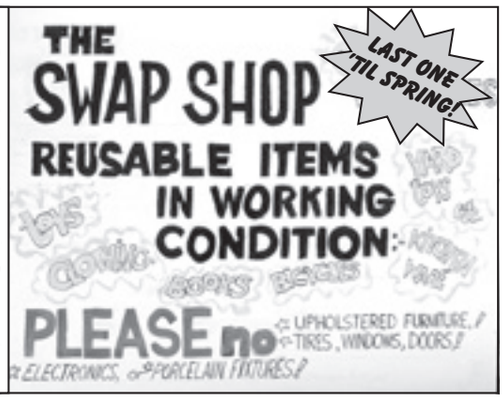
Single Stream Recycling

Single stream recycling is still in the planning stages. The Town is still interested in single stream recycling as proposed by the trash co-op. This will be especially attractive, since we expect the tipping fee on non-recycled waste to increase significantly in 2010. While all the ducks are not yet in a row for single stream as of this writing, we are tentatively planning on this program starting in 2011.

The Town has been a member of the trash co-op since its inception and has enjoyed fairly stable tipping fees as a result of the original 20-year agreement, which is now due to expire. It appears almost certain that the new rates will be significantly higher than the current rates.

It will soon be time for work to begin on the 2011 budget which will have the usual challenges to maintain as flat a budget as possible while dealing with rising expenses. The fact that we are facing decreasing revenues from the state as they deal with their budgetary restraints will be a big factor in the coming year.

The Swap Shop will be open on Oct. 10 from 8 AM to 2 PM and welcomes (before 1 PM) reusable items in working condition like toys, clothing, books, bicycles, and kitchenware. Please, *no* upholstered furniture, tires, windows, doors, electronics, or porcelain fixtures.



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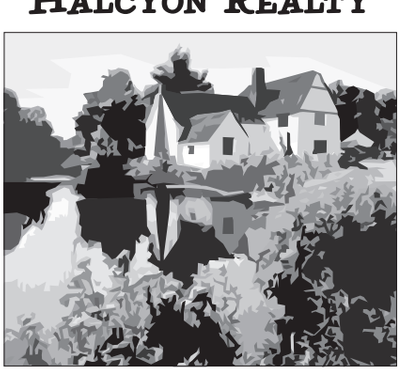

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