

OPINION

Redistricting by State Moves Andover into Larger Districts

Ken Wells, Andover

Readers have probably heard on the evening news about “redistricting” in New Hampshire by the party controlling the State House, but have not realized the effect it will have on Andover. Future court action this summer will likely determine the final shape of New Hampshire’s Senate, Executive Council, and US Congressional districts, but the New Hampshire House Districts have already been redrawn and signed into law by the Governor – a done deal.

Andover’s voting district has changed to Merrimack District 5 and has been enlarged by the addition of more towns. The towns in District 5 are Hill, Danbury, Andover, Salisbury, and Webster. That’s not all – Andover voters will now also vote to choose a Representative for District 26, which will include the towns of Hill, Andover, Salisbury, Webster, Boscawen, Canterbury, and Loudon.

Back in 1860, the good old house where my wife and I live belonged to a man named Elbridge Gerry Emery. He was named, no doubt, after the famous statesman Elbridge Gerry, born in 1744, who was the fifth Vice President of the United States and a leader of the Democratic-Republican Party of the day.

In spite of his many fine, but unfortunately largely forgotten achievements (such as signing the Declaration of Independence), Elbridge Gerry became eternally notorious for inventing the “gerrymander.” His gerrymandered districts were imagined by critics to resemble a squiggling salamander, wiggling across the map.

In redrawing districts, Gerry and his cronies sought to redraw new political boundaries snaking out from their

hometowns, creating artificial collections of supportive voters to ensure their reelection, while pushing their opponents into districts where they would be outnumbered. “Gerrymandering” is the name given to this anti-democratic ploy used by incumbent politicians to redraw their districts to “pick their voters,” rather than allowing a simple majority of voters the freedom to pick their representatives.

The new 2022 House districts will result in Andover citizens voting for three Representatives: two House Reps for District 5, and one in District 26. It’s going to be a procedure that many citizens may find confusing, as the ballot instructions will undoubtedly be a bit more complicated than they have been in the past.

Why has this happened? In theory, there should be one New Hampshire House Representative for each 3,500 people across the state, roughly. Our new enlarged District 5 has about 8,000 people, hence two Reps will certainly be chosen, but there will be yet more voters left over. Representation of those 1,000 people will be shared by creation of an overlapping “floterial” District 26, which includes most of District 5 plus Boscawen (population 4,000); Canterbury (population 5,600); and Loudon (population 5,600). In effect, Andover voters will have the opportunity to vote for three Representatives to the House.

In my opinion, creation of these overly-large, overlapping House districts (which exasperatingly bear little relation to the separately gerrymandered jigsaw districts for Senate, Executive Council, and US Congressional districts) make it

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OPINION

Proctor Recognizes Importance of Transparency with Andover

Recent property purchases explained

Brian Thomas

Head of School, Proctor Academy

Since 1848, Proctor Academy and the town of Andover have been inextricably linked: First as a school serving the children of the Andover and local area, and later as a boarding school serving high school aged boys, and now as a coeducational high school with students from 25 states and nine countries.

As Proctor has evolved and grown, so, too, has Andover. Much of this growth and evolution has been deeply intertwined with the town, not just in sharing the school’s facilities and being a partner in supporting our local elementary and middle school through service and donations of equipment, supplies, and expertise, but in taking over the maintenance of North Street, working with the Department of Transportation to install new crosswalks and paving Main Street, and in the payment of more than \$152,000 in property taxes to the Town of Andover this year.

While I am new to Proctor, and to Andover, I recognize the importance of open dialogue between the school I am charged with leading and the town in which I get to live and work. With 375 students and 200 full time employees (Andover’s largest employer), the challenges of providing adequate housing to our students and employees has led to the purchase of properties in town over the past few years. This spring, the school is in the process of acquiring both 25 and 26 North Street as additional housing for employees.

For each of these purchases, we thought long and hard about the impact they would have on the town and how to best balance Proctor’s needs for employee housing. As a residential school, housing for faculty is essential to attracting and retaining the qualified, dedicated teachers, coaches, and advisors who deliver Proctor’s mission.

The balancing act of Proctor’s needs and the town’s needs will never be perfect, but our hope is to remain in

dialogue with representatives from the Town Select Board and others in the community as we make these hard decisions.

Amplified by an incredibly challenging housing market over the past two years, I am fully aware of the perception of these actions by Proctor over the past seven years by those in town who might be looking to purchase a house or are concerned about Proctor’s impact on the tax base. My hope in this article is three-fold: to be fully transparent about Proctor’s recent real estate acquisitions, to clarify property tax policy for an organization like Proctor, and to invite those of you with questions or concerns to engage in dialogue moving forward.

As a non-profit educational institution, Proctor is not exempt from property taxes. In fact, this past year, Proctor paid roughly \$151,400 in property taxes to the Town of Andover, the largest taxpayer in town. The school does have a unique property tax situation, however, in that only buildings used directly for the housing of students and some administrative buildings are taxed, meaning these recent employee housing units are not taxed.

So while Proctor is paying taxes each year, the acquisition of employee housing units does have a direct impact on the Town budget, in the case of two recent purchases, or approximately \$8,500 in yearly assessed taxes. Proctor is actively looking to see how it can continue to partner with the Town to minimize the financial impact of these purchases.

Lastly, the Proctor/Andover Liaison Committee has long served both the school and the town as a place of important dialogue as decisions like real estate acquisitions are made. While this committee has not met for the past two years of pandemic living, we are working to reignite the necessary conversations that will allow both Proctor and the Town of Andover to thrive in the months, years, and decades ahead.

This Committee has included representatives from Proctor, the School Board, and Town Select Board in the past, and our hope is to expand membership on the committee to others in the community who have an important voice to share.

Thank you for welcoming me to Andover over this past year, and I hope we can continue to work together as a community in the years to come.

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be granted or applied for the use of the schools of institutions of any religious sect or denomination.”

Mary Anne Broshek
Andover



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