

Comings & Goings

SPECIAL EDITION

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Special Edition:

1st Year Scorecard: Delpha Very First Selectman

—————Woodstock Taxpayers 2—Delpha Very 0

Congratulations are in order. Our hearty congratulations go out to the Woodstock taxpayers who have not been deceived by the current town administration's plans to significantly raise their taxes.

The first attempt at picking the Woodstock taxpayers' pockets came last spring. Attorney Stephen Adams took the lead in a well-orchestrated, well-advertised attempt to overturn Proposition 46—which had effectively put a spending cap in place on town budgets for the past 25 years. We cannot believe Steve Adams would have done this without the blessing of Mrs. Very and the Republican Town Committee. The attempt to repeal Prop 46 was soundly defeated in a referendum vote that saw heavy voter turnout. We voters had our say that day in May—but we should remember who advocated raising taxes on the backs of the working men and women of this town.

The second, most recent, and rather discomfiting situation just occurred in September. A sizeable piece of land behind the now defunct Stoggy Hollow General Store / Restaurant on Route 198, which had been on the market for years, and considered to have low salability, was suddenly deemed a desirable parcel for purchase by the town. Open land is a big issue in a fast-developing Woodstock, but why this particular parcel? And why now?

Certainly, many of Woodstock's citizens support the town's wish to purchase desirable tracts of land, with the purpose of keeping them open, undeveloped, and accessible to the town's residents for recreational uses. However, some interesting facts have emerged about this land on Route 198 that the town government advocated purchasing. We lay these facts before all of you. A former first selectman of this town, Ed Neumann, owns this land. He also owned a home, and the Stoggy Hollow General Store, with his wife Carol. Carol ran the general store with a business partner—Delpha Very.

Apparently, the Board of Selectmen decided that they would bring the matter of purchasing Mr. Neumann's land for use as open space to the taxpayers. Mrs. Very recused herself from the matter in a Board of Selectmen's meeting; Mr. Alberts thought the issue should go to referendum and Mr. Eaffy thought it should go to Town Meeting. In a tie vote among the selectmen like this, the law prescribes that a Town Meeting format is automatic. The selectmen would then take a vote of the attendees at that meeting to seek the necessary "mandate" and purchase the land. We believe that anything of this magnitude should go to referendum. This land, 149 acres, had no direct access from Route 198 and was to be sold to the town for \$265,000. Could Delpha Very, Mike Alberts, and Mitchell Eaffy be serious? The date for the Town Meeting was quickly set for Wednesday, September 29th.

Some Woodstock citizens, uncomfortable that a vote to spend this kind of money for a dubious piece of land would be settled upon by a quick vote at a Town Meeting, decided to circulate a petition to get the 200 necessary signatures to force this issue to a vote—by referendum. When they applied to Mrs. Very for permission to circulate the petition for three days at the town dump (where a large number of Woodstockers routinely go), she allowed them access for only one day. Can this be right? Given the fact that the petitioners had but three days in total to secure the necessary signatures, they came up short in their effort to obtain the necessary 200 names.

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1st Year Scorecard (cont'd.)

When the Town Meeting convened, approximately 300 Woodstock residents showed up—to the surprise of the Board of Selectmen. The meeting had to be moved from Town Hall, due to inadequate space, to the Woodstock Elementary School. When the meeting reconvened, Town Clerk Judy Alberts proposed that Stephen Adams moderate the Town Meeting. There was a loud and vocal outcry by the citizenry, and they refused to allow Adams to preside. A motion was made proposing that Mike Alberts moderate, and he was nominated to preside when a second motion was made. A presentation was made by Sid Blodgett, Chair of the Conservation Commission, to the townspeople about the land. Questions arose that Blodgett could not immediately answer. For example, one Woodstock resident asked whether there was direct access to the land parcel from Route 198, and Blodgett had to consult the actual deed, finally announcing that there was not any “right of way”—from Route 198 to the property. Translation: there was no direct access from the main road!

Eventually, the questions got around to the long-term relationship between Delpha Very and the Neumanns. Another question was asked about the identity of the real estate agent who was selling the land. It was divulged that Roger Gale, a former selectman who did not seek reelection last November and a friend of Mrs. Very's, is the real estate agent. Mr. Gale's commission would have been 10%--\$26,500, based on the \$265,000 asking price.

A secret ballot was taken after Woodstock residents asked their questions and made their comments about this issue. Some citizens present at the meeting requested a secret ballot so they could cast their votes with privacy. After separating the “Yes” votes from the “No” votes, it was determined that only about 90 present at the Town Meeting were in favor of the land purchase, with everyone else in attendance opposed. The proposed land purchase went down to defeat.

At best, this proposal on the part of the Board of Selectmen smacks of nepotism. At worst, it smacks of possible corruption. Why in the world would Delpha Very, Mike Alberts and Mitchell Eaffy even consider bringing this proposal to the citizens of Woodstock? Did you know that the State of Connecticut has already given the Woodstock Conservation Commission headed by Sid Blodgett a list of approved open land parcels studied by the State and designated for purchase? Why would the Board of Selectmen go along with the Woodstock Conservation Commission's deviation from that list and propose that the taxpayers buy a piece of land that has been on the market for years, was not considered desirable by developers, had recently been timbered, and that couldn't be directly accessed?.

At a time when the State of Connecticut has just survived the worst gubernatorial scandal in its history, the taxpayers are in no mood for more suspicious political shenanigans. Perhaps it is time for the citizens of Woodstock to mount a serious effort to force a referendum of our own—one that will enact a new “law” [in the form of an ordinance]—that any proposed town spending, above \$20,000 and beyond the approved town budget, must go to referendum. In that way voters will have their say so that no hurriedly called Town Meeting, which might be lightly attended, will determine our financial future. This town is in debt enough. Did you know that Woodstock already has a debt service of \$1.2 million dollars factored into our operating budget this year?

The last thing we need in Woodstock is more ill-advised spending. We will only have a responsible local government if we watch what our Board of Selectmen are doing—and hold them accountable to us. Woodstock residents, especially the new ones, are slowly becoming aware of the politics in our town. And they're not comfortable with some of their observations. Nor are they deceived.

What's next? What will the third attempt by Delpha Very, Mike Alberts, and Mitchell Eaffy be to raise our taxes? When will it be coming? Let's all be vigilant!

Citizens for Prudent Spending, Inc.

PO Box 285
Woodstock, CT 06281
www.prudentpending.org

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