

This document is in MS word format. For those having trouble reading the news letter the MS Word file is attached.

Town Update

The last town update was in late May, following Town Elections and Town Meeting and so here are a few things to bring you up to date on.

1. **August 19th PUBLIC hearing on the Towns contract with**

Comcast. The selectmen are required to hold this hearing prior to issuing a new cable contract. The old Comcast contract is expiring shortly.

I am advocating for a town PEG (Public, Educational & Governmental) channel as one way to provide news, and information to many town residents. For people who do not have cable TV the information (delayed broadcast) can be gained via any computer with an internet connection. For those with neither, information can be accessed by using the Town's Library computers.

A PEG channel could provide viewer access to town and school district annual meetings, select board meetings, school board meetings, various town commission and board meetings, school plays & sports, real time bulletin board updates, and various other programs of interest such as a book club review etc.

The good news is that there is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Many towns have already negotiated with and received start up **GRANT MONEY** from Comcast to support the equipment start up cost for a community channel. I believe I heard that Concord received \$600,000. (This would be an offset to taxes needed to support the schools film studies program.)

The City of Concord already contracts with a private not-for-profit to manage the public channels and Bow could do the same.

The Basic Plan Comcast subscribers will see a 38 cents per week increase in their bill.

The percent charged is calculated only on the TV portion of the a Comcast bill. That is to say that Comcast Internet and Phone Service charges are excluded from all PEG calculations.

If you are interested in hearing more please attend the meeting. If we include a PEG channel then I am in favor of contracting the administrative function to the non-profit Concord Community TV and having a channel dedicated to Bow.

2. NH cities, towns and school boards have officially been notified of cuts in state financial support. For us in Bow all tolled it looks like \$500,000 less then last year. The state increased its spending by about 10.5% while the town and school Board tried to hold spending level. After reviewing the states revenue projections for next year and more frightening how they proposed to balance their budget for the year ending June 30th, 2009 it is likely Bow will get stiffed even harder in the near future. The Superior court has already ruled that the state can not lay claim to \$110 MILLION of private money placed in to the private malpractice insurance program. Around \$65 million of that was needed to pay the bills for the state fiscal year that just ended. When the states other creative financial shenanigans begin to crumble it is entirely likely for Bow, along with other cities, towns and school districts, to expect the state to renege on more promises to share revenue.

2.

3. The new town ambulance. Reporting on this issue may upset some resident but none the less residents have a right to know what happened with the purchase of our new ambulance.

The bids have been returned and it appears Bow solicited bids from only two vendors and one of those was immediately eliminated from consideration. Thus we will purchase a new \$170,000 town ambulance on what amounts to a no bid contract. I do not believe there is evil intent but it is troubling in these economic times to think that Bow did not seek more vendors as I suspect many

of them are hurting for business in these economic times. I questioned at the board meeting whether or not the town taxpayers had received the best price available at the time.

To make sure this does not happen again I would suggest that a town bid committee be established. The committee would be charged with overseeing and reporting to the Select Board all public bids in excess of \$25,000. The committee would be comprised of the Town Manager and /or an employee of the affected town department, a Selectman, and several Bow residents. The Select Board member will chair the committee.

A few weeks ago the town Capital Improvement Committee convened to review the town administration and town committees anticipated Capital needs for next year and into the next decade. The committee received projections that included for this year the issuing \$10 million plus in new bonds to complete the Water and Sewer project. In the next few years there were projections of \$4 million in bonds for a new public safety complex, millions more in new bonds for a new recreation center and new ball fields and many other request for replacement or new equipment. The categories for Capital Improvement are very broad. As an example when we placed money into the Fire Equipment Fund it included the purchase of fire engine/ladder truck. The fact remains that town meeting would still have to vote on the actual purchase of the engine or ladder truck but by putting money aside it allows those who want new piece of equipment to argue that the money is already in the fund so why not spend it. After all it won't cost any new tax dollars.

4. **The school board** reviewed the recent assessment of the teaching philosophy at the high School. This lead to a frank discussion of the High Schools philosophy of heterogeneous classrooms. Heterogeneous classes have students of all abilities in one class room. Note: Bow is not unique in adopting this philosophy.

The student who struggles in with basic math is in the same class room as the child who excels in algebra. A homogenous class would rank and place students based upon their ability. Those struggling with basic math would be in one algebra class while those who excel would be in a different class. A couple of the reasons given in support of the mixed class room were that it created respect for all students, teachers and staff; and that it eliminated or decreased any stigma associated with being in the slow class. It was argued that the goal of a school is to teach tolerance and respect as well as subject matter.

The question was asked if there was any empirical data that supported the claim of enriched academic success with the heterogeneous program. There was none offered. For some in the field the standardized tests are not considered great indicators of academic success or failure. A question was asked about the stress on teachers who would be required to prepare 20 different lesson plans each night in order to meet the individual needs of 20 students with very different learning abilities. The response was that you had to see it in action to understand the programs success. In this type of class room grading is based upon the individual's ability. To offer an extreme example consider that two students with widely different math abilities in the same algebra class. The first student receives an A when she/he grasp the concept of fractions. A second student in the same class who is much stronger in math receives a B because according to the individual skills assessment he/she should be performing quadratic equations perfectly but is still making mistakes on a one or two questions.

I now understand one of the reasons why Bow eliminated class ranking. Grades do not reflect total mastery of subject matter but rather individual improvement. Thus it was possible for an academically challenged student like me in high school to be ranked higher then a class mate who had a much greater and far superior understanding of all subject matter. Given this reality class ranking means little to any college trying to assess ones skills to perform college work.

Finally, a reminder, beginning is September the school board meets the first Thursday of every month at 7PM at the High School. The Select Board meetings are not scheduled on any regular night but usually start at 5:30PM and are held in the Town Administrative building on Grandview Road. Check the town web site under news, then click calendar to see when all town committee meetings are held.

The public is encouraged to exercise their right to attend all public meetings. Both the Select and School board offers opportunity for public comment. The Select Board goes beyond comment and allows the public to ask questions, the School Board **does not**.

If there are any questions or comment you would like me to make at either the School Board or Select Board meetings please send me an email.

Tom Keane

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