

# Letters & Opinion

## Apology to Martin Family and the Amherst Community

To the editor:

I was insensitive and owe the Amherst community and the Martin family an apology. At our Board of Selectmen meeting on Monday, January 26, I expressed my reasoning for not supporting the current Open Space Advisory Committee warrant to purchase land and a home by describing the home on those beautiful acres in not-so-complimentary terms. My comments were supposed to emphasize that Bruce Berry's DPW department cannot possibly be forced to oversee the daily upkeep, possible renovation, and sale of the beautiful, historic farmhouse. Instead, my words were insulting. I certainly did not intend this and I am sorry and regret my choice of words. If the warrant does not pass, I hope OSAC and the Board of Selectmen can work out a better deal with the Martin family that would not include the ownership of a home but will conserve the vista acres for generations to come.

Best Personal Regards,  
Brad Galinson  
Member, Amherst Board of Selectmen

## Master Plan Or Master Disaster?

To the editor:

The best made plans sometimes create unintended consequences that are detrimental to the intended goals. This may be the case with the Master Plan? Most would agree that Amherst is a suburban community with rural characteristics surrounding an antique village with business largely confined to peripheral access roads. We have an outstanding school system of which we can be proud, little crime, no gangs and a pleasant home town to raise families and grow in years.

The Master Plan contains several objectives: increased density, increased diversity and increased retail within our near perfect community that threaten the fundamental character of what we value in Amherst.

First, increased density is a move away from a minimum of two plus acres for individual homes to bring us condominiums and town homes. Whereas large individual homes, on average, bring demographically advantaged families (high education/high income), pay very high property taxes with fewer children (tax contributions exceed needed services), which is especially the case in regard to school taxes, high density housing attracts on average, more people per household and in particular, more children with a lower tax base. This puts an escalator on school growth that inevitably leads to the demand for a larger school system and increased taxes. Our school is now perfectly sized. It is not too small so that a diverse curriculum is offered for children at all levels while not being too large so that teachers provide individual attention and kids don't get 'lost.' Such 'growth' also puts pressure on other town resources resulting in increased taxes.

Second, increased diversity is a complex issue. Years ago, there was an argument that the Amherst School System did not produce enough "Ivy Leaguers" compared to the Acton/Boxboro school district in MA. This was a bad measurement for a lot of reasons, but one cause of the difference was that the latter was one of the wealthiest districts in MA, far richer than we. That's a demographic factor. Is it not to our advantage to have slow growth or minimum growth from an advantaged demographic? Why not strictly enforce the two plus acre standard that exists, allowing exceptions ONLY for 1) Expansions to existing homes where neighbors AGREE to say an encroachment on the set back line and 2) Housing for over 50 without children and senior housing? The latter spends lots of money in our community, keeps families together and is a net tax "payer" that does not place demands on our school system.

Third, does anyone really want a Dunkin Donuts and convenience store in every neighborhood? Is it too far to drive ten minutes to all the goods and services we need? True, they would pay taxes, however, what would happen to our wonderful Moulton's Market? What about the sales we take away from existing businesses? Isn't it really a 'wash' from a tax point of view and only serves to change the character of our community?

Lastly, who benefits from increased density, increased diversity and increased retail in neighborhoods? I can only think of developers, large land owners who hope to cash-in at our expense, realtors and bankers. These folks are all highly motivated to find a way around our zoning laws and the Master Plan is an opportunity to sweep them aside in one fell swoop. Committees that work on such tasks certainly have folks working for our benefit, however, not everyone is so pure of heart and a positive result is anything but certain. Just look at the 'improvements' to the waste management facility. What a disappointment! Some, whose interests would be advanced, no doubt believe their purpose is noble. From our perspective, we like Amherst just the way it is with it's 'right sized' school system and quiet, safe neighborhoods. Perhaps the best plan is no master plan, slow growth and enforcing existing zoning laws, with a few beneficial exceptions.

Fred and Linda Morsheimer  
Amherst

## Letters to The Editor:

*The Amherst Citizen* is eager to serve as a community forum. We welcome your letters, opinions, and commentaries and make every effort to run them in their entirety. We do reserve the right to edit. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the position of the staff of *The Amherst Citizen*.

Please direct your letters, views and commentary to the Editor, *The Amherst Citizen*, P.O. Box 291, Amherst, NH 03031-0291, or e-mail your submission to: [news@amherstcitizen.com](mailto:news@amherstcitizen.com). We will attempt to run your letter as submitted (space permitting) providing it is signed and phone number is included.

## I Oppose Warrant Article #31 – This Year

To the editor:

"In answer to a question from Mr. Kaminsky, the Chief mentioned that anything over 20 years the ISO does not recognize and the life cycle plan for fire engines is 23 years." Amherst Fire Chief Rick Todd testimony at Amherst Public Hearing 1/19/09 excerpt from the minutes

The Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS) does not specify any maximum age for fire apparatus. ISO Mitigation Online <http://www.isomitigation.com>

Clearly these two statements are in direct disagreement. In an effort to clarify this dichotomy, members of the Amherst Citizens' Association called ISO. The ISO representative confirmed that they did not care about the age of the fire apparatus, only its ability to function. According to ISO, the functionality is based on how much water and hose the truck can carry, how many gallons a minute the truck can pump, and if there is any special equipment on the truck.

If I understand Chief Todd correctly, he plans to replace Engine #3 in the very near future. This engine has a galvanneal body and an aluminum cab, neither of which rust. At the time Engine #3 was purchased we were told that this was a more expensive option, but would pay for itself over its 30 year lifespan. I present this information because of the last 2 fire trucks our AFD and Board of Selectmen decided to junk. The first was Engine #4, an all wheel drive pumper that was immediately refurbished and put back into service as a front line piece of equipment in Maine. The second was the old tanker that was "rusted beyond repair, difficult to drive, and impossible to get repair parts" according to then Chief John DaSilva. Our Selectmen authorized \$400,000 to purchase a new tanker that has yet to put water on a working fire. And our old tanker? It is still in service awaiting a new tank.

I am not against purchasing fire trucks. I am not against the capital reserve fund. I do think the citizens of Amherst should know the whole truth before they vote, and not be scared into a hasty decision based on incomplete information and innuendos.

As for this specific warrant? Not this year. The economic future is just too uncertain for us to be committing large sums of money to replace a piece of equipment that still has plenty of lifespan left. Next year, if things are better, I'll lead the way in support of this fund.

Tedd Landon  
Amherst

## Plenty Of Blame To Go Around

To the editor:

I am writing in response to Bill Martel's "In Defense of Capitalism and Free Markets" in January 27th's Amherst Citizen. Mr. Martel's defense of capitalism as the engine of our economy is right on, with one critical exception.

Unfortunately, he repeats a myth that is often heard today: that too much government regulation is responsible for today's economic crisis. His claim is that "Washington policymakers forced banks to make high risk loans." Mr. Martel doesn't provide any backup for this claim, and it didn't make a lot of sense to me, so I decided to look into it. I found that some have blamed the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), which was enacted in 1977 and revamped in 1990. The CRA was designed to reduce redlining and other structural barriers to credit for low income communities. It applied only to banks and thrifts that were federally insured, not the mortgage brokers that are culpable for much of today's crisis. Furthermore, the CRA is over 30 years old, but the reckless lending at the root of today's crisis is of much more recent origin. I won't go into any more details here, but for an excellent analysis see Robert Gordon's article in The American Prospect ([www.prospect.org](http://www.prospect.org)) from April 7, 2008.

The truth is that nobody forced anyone to make irresponsible loans – they were made in pursuit of profit, pure and simple. Does that mean capitalism and free markets are a bad idea? Of course not, they just need some common sense controls. As President Obama said in his inaugural address, "[The market's] power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched. But this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control. The nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous."

There is plenty of blame to go around for today's crisis: securitization of mortgages, reckless lending by those who should have known better, credit rating agencies that failed to protect the public because they were being paid by those whose credit instruments they were rating, reckless borrowing by all of us to feed our excessive spending habits, and federal regulators who were not doing their job.

Let's stop worshipping our economic system like it came down from Mount Sinai on stone tablets. It's a great system, but like any human invention, it has its flaws. We need our government to apply some common sense rules to protect us from those who would exploit the flaws for personal gain at the expense of all of us.

Bruce Kinney  
Amherst

## Martin Property – Take This Opportunity To Preserve This Open Land

To the editor:

We have just returned from 1 1/2 weeks in the San Francisco area and were very disappointed to read, upon catching up with mail and newspapers, that the Selectmen are not supporting the land bond recommended by OSAC. We had sunny high 60's weather in California, but are very glad to be back home. All the nice weather in the world doesn't make up for the insanity of that overbuilt area with packed roads, long lines in the grocery store, and tremendous noise pollution. Just about every inch of land is built upon. Is this what we want to leave to future generations? When open space is gone, it's gone for good. If the selectmen are looking for the "perfect" parcel or the "perfect" deal, it may never come. In the mean time land that can be set aside, and even better, land that ties into corridors of open space, will be lost to development. More houses will only further stress our roads, schools, grocery stores and the peacefulness of the surroundings we have here in Amherst. Californians can't understand why we choose to live where there is ice and snow. We can't understand how they can live in such a noisy built-up area where they spend hours of their week waiting in lines – be it on the roads or in the stores. Let's take this opportunity to preserve this open land, where the "noise pollution" is caused by birds and frogs!!

Jan Woodbury  
Amherst

## O'Mara Seeks Election to Board Of Selectmen Seat

To the editor:

My name is Jim O'Mara and I am writing to announce that, after serious consideration and more importantly with the blessing of my family, I have decided to seek one of the open seats on the Board of Selectman.

I have been active in the community for the last 16 years beginning as a Recreation Department volunteer coach of baseball, softball, basketball and soccer. During this time I was also appointed as a member of the Ways and Means Committee. At the time of my appointment the committee was charged with the task of reviewing the budget and warrant initiatives for both the town and Amherst School District, before being broken into two separate committees.

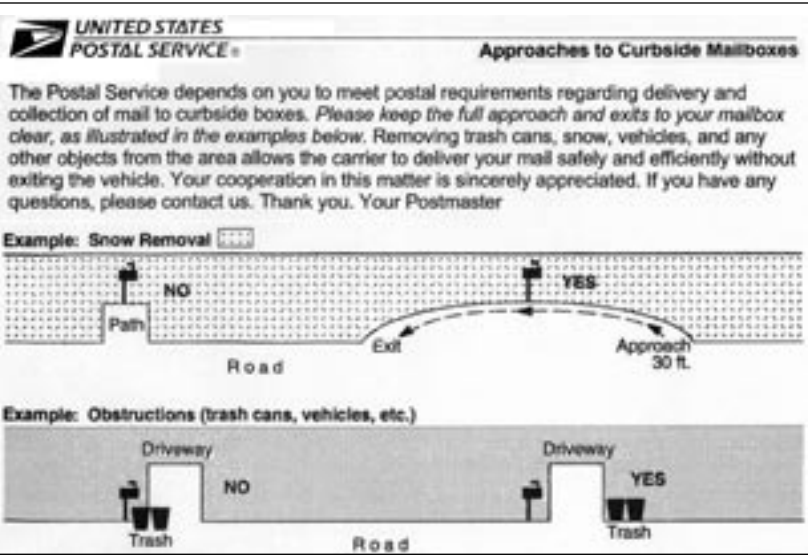
More recently I was a two term elected member of the Amherst School Board. My reason for running was to assist with the fiscal issues which were plaguing the district and I felt I could help. As one member of a five member board it is difficult to identify any progress the Amherst School Board made during this period for which I can take specific credit. However, as a Board which was not shy of public debate, we were successful in never having to ask the voters for a deficit appropriation. In fact, for five of my six years the Board returned unexpended funds back to the taxpayers to offset the following year's tax impact. We established a long overdue purchasing policy and a budget transfer system which documented the movement of funds from one line in the budget to another requiring justification for the movement of monies. All budget transfers were voted on at regular board meetings in public session. In collaboration with the Board of Selectmen we used school property and town auto registration funds to create needed field space on the Bean property off of Boston Post Road. Most importantly, after much heated debate, we agreed to pursue a course of long needed school building renovations in lieu of building a new school. This is perhaps the best example of a governing body balancing the need of the school district to provide educational services and the taxpayers' ability to pay.

I believe a common sense analysis of available information by elected officials along with welcomed and encouraged public input are the key ingredients to a positive direction for Amherst.

I commit to being accessible to you and will bring my municipal budgeting skills into office. I will continue to insist that all issues be debated publicly and to ensure that the town's business be conducted openly at regular and/or special meetings. Finally, I will strive to maintain the delicate balance between the delivery of essential town services and your ability to pay.

We face difficult and challenging times ahead and I am offering to help. I would appreciate you considering me to represent you on the Amherst Board of Selectmen. If you would like to contact me for any reason please do so by email at [jmojr1@aol.com](mailto:jmojr1@aol.com).

Respectfully,  
Jim O'Mara



## ISSUE DATE CHANGE:

The March 10th issue of *The Amherst Citizen* will now publish on Thursday, March 5th in order to provide last minute election coverage of the candidates, town and school budgets and warrant articles to be voted on Tuesday, March 10th. Deadline for the March 5th issue is 5PM, Thursday, February 26th.

Candidates: Visit our advertising and profile opportunities pages at: [www.amherstcitizen.com/candidates.html](http://www.amherstcitizen.com/candidates.html)

### NEXT ISSUE:

Tues., February 24, 2009  
Deadline: 5 p.m.  
Wednesday, February 18

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— 2009 —	
February 10	June 9
February 24	June 23
MARCH 5*	July 28
March 24	August 25
April 14	September 8
April 28	September 22
May 12	October 13
May 26	October 27

\*Dates are subject to change.  
Watch future issues for schedule updates.  
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Published 22 times a year on the 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each Month, on the last Tuesday July and August, and the 1st and 3rd Tuesday in December. (Dates may vary near Holidays or elections.)

Subscriptions: \$15.00 per year (prepaid)  
P.O. Box 291, Amherst, NH 03031-0291  
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