

Letters & Opinion

What About “The Rest of Amherst”?

To the editor:

I'm sure everyone is as pleased as I that the Board Of Selectmen (BOS) have committed to real transparency in their planning for The Village. Coupled with an open invitation for all to share ideas their openness deserves sincere recognition. In keeping with this transparency I would like to open a dialog with the officials and residents regarding their thoughts on "The Rest of Amherst".

The following information is supplied by either the 2010 US Census or the Nashua Regional Planning Commission. While it may be the information slightly varies from today's facts the variance would be insignificant for the purposes of this dialog.

Amherst NH has a total population of just over 11,000. The Village has 315+/- residences (homes). The Rest of Amherst has over 4000 residences. The average "family" living in Amherst consists of 2.53 people. Of the total population then The Village has a little less than 800 residents and on the other hand The Rest of Amherst has a little more than 10,000.

Now as a longtime resident (compared to most but not everyone) I have been blessed to pass through or acquaint myself with a number of other sections outside The Village. Some you may have heard of others perhaps not. Places such as Christian Hill, Walnut Hill, Chestnut Hill just to name a few "hills". Then there is Ponemah, Cricket Corner, and The Acre - where I grew up-to name a few other locations outside The Village. And what about "Mother Gardner's Crossing" such a merry establishment in its time, and not to be forgotten, in another section of town. Not sure on which side of the tracks the Gardner "House" was located but no matter - It was the wrong side! Anyway just a few of the sections in The Rest of Amherst.

My curiosity compels me to wonder and therefore ask in this article, why is it that The Rest of Amherst has - and evidently is being prepared to do so again - been expected through taxation to support projects amounting to multi-millions of dollars (think Town Hall for one) for the almost exclusive benefit of so few of The Village residents when there are 10,000 taxpayers living in many wonderful and colorful sections of town with interesting history which have not seen but a pittance, if that, of beautification. Projects which would enhance their property values as happens in The Village.

I wonder if this has crossed the minds of any of the 10,000 other residents living somewhere in The Rest of Amherst or those living in The Village for that matter?

Peter Hansen
Amherst

Happy New Year Amherst!

To the editor:

It's that time of year, where we reflect on the past along with getting ready for the new one ahead. So in the spirit of the holidays, I thought I would come up with my own New Year's wish list for the town of Amherst. First and foremost, the most important thing is everyone's safety and good health. This is truly a non-comprehensive "wish" list that has no scientific or political agenda behind it other than my own personal opinions as a sincerely grateful citizen.

Continued focus on education to ensure our children have every opportunity to excel. Support our teachers and the administration to ensure Amherst drives toward and retains a high level of academic excellence. Our children and town's success depends on it.

More recreation resources and opportunities for all residents to enjoy including updating existing fields and facilities

No more multi-unit housing/developments. Let's retain the rural quality and feel of this beautiful town.

Sidewalks on our public roads. Connect neighbors and town resources with a safe means of walking.

No Kinder-Morgan gas pipeline developed through our town.

For parents to get out and vote in our local elections! Let your voice be heard.

Sure it's fun to put lists like this together, but lucky for us, there are boundless opportunities to get involved to help move this town forward. So, what's on your New Year's wish list?

Patrick Daniel
Amherst

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www.amherstcitizen.com

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. We will attempt to run your letter as submitted (space permitting) providing it is signed and phone number is included.

Re: Concealed Firearms is a Form of Self-Defense and Reduces Violent Crimes

To the editor:

The opening statement is that life would be horrific without guns. That would come as a surprise to the family and friends of the 30,000 plus Americans killed with guns every year. That amounts to 85 deaths a day, or more than 3 an hour. Over 20% of those killed are children or young adults, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

States with the highest levels of gun ownership have unintentional firearm deaths at nine times the rate of states with the lowest levels of gun ownership ("Firearm availability and unintentional firearm deaths", Miller, Azrael, and Hemenway). Abused women are five times as likely to be killed if their abuser owns a firearm ("Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships", Campbell, et al).

The letter also states that carrying a firearm is a form of self-defense, and that it reduces violent crime. However, using a gun in self-defense is no more likely to reduce the chance of being injured during a crime than various other means of self-protection ("Private guns", Hemenway). The FBI reports in "Crime in the United States, 2009" that less than 2% of the people murdered in that year were killed by firearms in "justifiable homicides".

In comparison to other developed countries, the United States rate of firearm related deaths is much higher; six times the average, and forty times that of the United Kingdom, which has strict gun control laws. The facts do not support the claim that guns, concealed or otherwise, make us safer. The opposite is true.

Respectfully,
Clay Sammis
Amherst

Planning For Declining School Enrollments

To the editor:

Student enrollment is a major topic at school board meetings of late. At present, enrollment is down in SAU 39 as a whole, as we reflect the aging population of our towns. Our school boards and administrations have responded accordingly to this decline. Souhegan High School, however, has not yet seen the dramatic drop that the lower grades have seen. After an initial drop between FY06 - FY 10 (from our peak enrollment of 1045), our student population has remained steady (current enrollment is 842). Souhegan High School's enrollment actually went up by 4% over the past two years, while our budget went down by 2.85% the first year, and up slightly the second year by 1.22%. The high school's enrollment is projected to remain relatively steady until 2018.

The Souhegan board has been working with the administration to plan for declining enrollments for the last four years, and has been taking measured steps to reduce costs as changing enrollments have allowed. Here is a brief chronology of the steps taken so far, and planning that is underway to prepare for potential future declines:

- **FY12: Closed one of our two cafeterias**
- **FY13: Negotiated a 2 year contract that included:**
 - o .75% salary increase for professional staff over a 2 year period
 - o 1.25% salary increase for support staff over a 2 year period
 - o health plans that reflected reduced prescription benefits, introduced higher health deductibles, provided incentives to choose lower cost providers, and for healthy living choices
- **FY14: Eliminated 10.2 positions**
- **FY14: Formed a Budget Study Committee that meets throughout the year to examine our finances on a continual basis. Some of the many topics currently under review are: our budget review process as a whole; facilities usage plan; and the incorporation of our SAU Board's Strategic Plan into Souhegan planning and operations**
- **FY15: Eliminated 3.5 positions**
- **FY15: Negotiated a contract with a 0% increase for staff over the next two years, with incentives for a lower cost health plan**
- **Ongoing: Our administration has been reviewing program of studies and staff placements to meet student needs with the minimum required staffing.**

We feel privileged to work with a forward thinking administration who ensure our students are prepared for whatever future they choose. We would like to especially thank our staff whose professionalism is second to none, and who are more than willing to work with our board to control costs, while maintaining the high level of education our residents expect.

To learn more about the FY15-16 proposed budget, please join us at our Public Hearing on Wednesday, January 14, 2015, 6 pm, in the Souhegan High School Auditorium. We will be presenting the budget again at our Deliberative Session on February 2, 2015. Voting will be held on Tuesday, March 10, 2015. Amherst residents vote at Souhegan High School, 6AM to 8PM. Mont Vernon residents vote at the Mont Vernon Village School, 7AM to 7PM.

The Souhegan Cooperative School Board:
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Steve Coughlan, Amherst
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Chris Janson, Amherst
Peter Maresco, Amherst

Pipeline Would Trample on Amherst's 2010 Master Plan

To the editor:

When the Amherst Planning Board created the town's latest Master Plan in 2010, it stated that "Amherst's Vision" is to "preserve and enhance its unique rural and small town character."

Among the "Ten Key Master Plan Recommendations" contained in our town's 2010 Master Plan were:

- 1 - Ensure that new development and redevelopment respect Amherst's natural resources and complement the town's existing character
- 2 - Continue to preserve Amherst's natural resources and rural landscapes...and water and air quality
- 3 - Save open space in residential development

Fast forward to 2015, and Amherst finds itself in the crosshairs of a proposal by the Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company and Kinder Morgan. They propose running a high-pressure natural gas transmission pipeline through existing residential neighborhoods and across taxpayers' private property and tunneling under the Souhegan River four times in less than a ½-mile near Souhegan High School.

Citizens in 18 communities across southern New Hampshire are fighting this proposal, as numerous communities in Massachusetts did before the pipeline route was moved north of their state border and into our state.

Pipeline developers have proposed paying the town a bit more than \$500,000.00 for the right to barrel through Amherst. But in so doing, they would trample on the majority of goals stated by our town's own 2010 Master Plan, and force many town residents to file for property tax abatements and other remedies to offset expected devaluation of private properties.

And what of the new safety issues that would be raised by the location of such a natural gas pipeline through Amherst? One can only surmise the Amherst Fire Department is not currently trained or prepared with the proper equipment to deal with a potential "anomaly" as pipeline developers might call it.

Private citizens and selectmen in other New Hampshire towns are joining the opposition to the pipeline. Hollis has already successfully forced it to be diverted around that town. The pipeline proposal is now Amherst's calling as a community to preserve our natural resources and rural, small town character.

It is our responsibility to preserve the integrity of the Souhegan River, of existing residential neighborhoods, and important open spaces and woodlands in Amherst. You can learn more by visiting NHPipelineAwareness.org, or by joining the new Amherst Citizens Natural Gas Pipeline Awareness group on Facebook.

Joseph Daniel McCool
Amherst

Opposition Regarding The Proposed Kinder Morgan Pipeline Project Route Through Amherst

To the editor:

We live in one of the residential/rural neighborhoods in Amherst where the proposed Kinder Morgan 36" natural gas pipeline route is currently slated to go right through. Our historic property, located along the Souhegan River in Amherst, dates back to the early to mid 1700s. Our 50 acres, as well as our entire neighborhood, consists of some of the most environmentally sensitive lands located in Amherst, including wetlands, the protected aquifer, protected Souhegan River shoreline, wildlife habitats and corridors, and the floodplain. If the Kinder Morgan Pipeline project is routed through Amherst as it is currently being planned, we are direct abutters.

We are not opposed to reasonable and thoughtful development in Amherst. It is unrealistic to think in this day and age that our property taxes can solely continue to support our state, counties' and towns' budgets. However, we have all driven through perfectly lovely areas in our state, where suddenly an eyesore will appear, and you think to yourself: "who allowed THIS to go HERE"??

We believe a project of this magnitude, would be more appropriately sited in commercial and industrial areas or along the state's roadways and bridges: our roads and bridges are in desperate shape, and it would seem sensible to us, that this pipeline project might bring natural gas AND revenue to the state, so that the state finally has the funds to fix our crumbling roads and red-flagged bridges, versus bringing a pipeline of this magnitude through neighborhoods and close proximity to our schools.

Thank you, Wendy and Randy Hunt
Amherst

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