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Town Meeting Finishes Business in Two Days

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May 3, 2017 -- Town meeting got off to a slow start last night with residents debating and adding amendments to a handful of articles, including Article 44 (town meeting quorum), the sale of alcohol at town facilities, waste and debris in people's yards, and an attempt by selectman Todd Cestari (At mic , above)to make constable an appointed position.

Article 44, proposed by Pamela Waxlax, a member of the appropriations committee, proposed that town meetings require 75 registered voters for any discussion to take place. The current law requires 100 registered voters to be present for discussing fiscal matters and 1 registered voter for civic matters.

Article 44 received criticism from residents who believed that lowering the quorum to 75 for all matters was not beneficial to a town that was experiencing unprecedented growth.

"I appreciate the citizens' petition to make a quorum for non-financial articles," said selectman Todd Cestari. "That being said, I don't feel comfortable lowering the bar to 75 for financial articles; there should be a standard, but we shouldn't go backwards," Cestari said.

Resident Darlene Hayes proposed an amendment, which passed, that would require 1% of all registered voters to attend town meetings in order for a quorum, which roughly equates to 115 residents being present, less than the number who attended both town meetings this week.

Article 45, which authorized alcohol to be served at 3 events per year at public buildings such as the new library, town hall, and the senior center, wasn't enough for some residents.

"I organize non profit events, and if we limit only 3 events a year then non profits who don't get one of those slots will go to another town," said Hayes.

An amendment proposing an unlimited number of events at public buildings for nonprofits passed with little resistance.

Planning Board member Cliff Kistner (left) proposed limiting the licensing to only beer and wine for non profit organizations. Residents opposed this measure saying that beer and wine would be a disservice to those who prefer hard liquor.

"Some citizens give up beer for lent," said selectman John Coutinho. "We should not limit to only beer and wine, some people don't like beer and wine."

Another resident said, "What about bloody Mary's and mimosas?" The amendment, limiting alcohol to only beer and wine failed.

Selectman Brian Herr tried to clear up some misunderstandings in regards to this article.

"This article gives the town the opportunity to celebrate the opening of new facilities such as the library," said Herr. "I'm glad to see the town has expanded upon that."

Some residents were not as proud of the article as Herr and said that the Board of Selectmen should be ashamed of themselves for allowing public buildings to serve alcoholic beverages.

Increased fines for inhumane conditions at kennels passed, although one resident claimed that these fines were a witch hunt in response to the legal troubles facing Greyhound Friends. Others supported the measure, such as Chairman of the Baypath Humane Society, Susan Rossnick.

"This article shows strong support for animal rights," Rossnick said.

Rossnick also said at town meeting that Bay Path would submit a proposal for the land in parcel 8 at the Fruit Street complex. The article that proposed allocating this land to a humane society of the selectmen's choice passed.

Article 47, labeled Construction Waste or Debris Bylaw, received strong support from a Blueberry Lane resident, who said her house backs up to a man who has been collecting junk for 20 years.

"Something has to be done," said the resident. "He says he's building something but nothing has been built and stuff keeps showing up; it's a junkyard."

Resident Mike Shepard countered her argument by reminiscing of his younger days and how neighbors used to work things out without calling the Department of Public Works or the Police.

"Hopkinton is a rural town and people have a right to do what they want with their land," Shepard said.

The Blueberry Lane resident disagreed.

“I feel like I'm living in a war zone,” said the resident. “I've tried to communicate with this neighbor and he's not very nice. He has sworn at me numerous times. I can't live, and let my kids play in my yard, while I'm looking at a junkyard.”

This article passed with the full support of the Board of Selectmen.

Lastly, Constables will continue to be an elected position in spite of Selectmen Todd Cestari's pitching for the position to become an appointed position.

“We have had numerous election cycles in which no one runs for this position, it would just make it easier if we appointed a person for this position.”

Darlene Hayes disagreed saying that she enjoys having the opportunity to vote for an elected official.

Town meeting adjourned for this year and will reconvene next May in 2018.