

Tension and resentment breeds among Epsom townspeople after local election

By Emily Langlais

Frustration is growing among residents of Epsom after Town Warrant Article 1 failed yet again after a local election on March 8th. Epsom selectmen and some townspeople dedicated to local politics were devastated after the article failed, as it has been on the town ballot for years. The article needed 3/5 of townspeople to vote in favor of it in order to pass, and failed by only 14 votes.

“Epsom has gotten the reputation as a town that won’t pass anything,” said Chairman of Epsom Selectmen, Don Harty, in an interview the Monday after the election, before the weekly Selectmen’s meeting.

Article 1 proposed that the town raise a sum of nearly \$800,000 in order to build a new Town Office Building. The conflict that some voters had with passing this article is that Epsom originally designated their historic meetinghouse for this purpose close to a decade ago, and much work still needs to be done before the building can be converted into offices.

Some people in town feel that the old meetinghouse should be used for a town office building, instead of paying taxes for a whole new building.

“I am very much against [Article 1] because we worked for years to have a town center,” said 89-year old Epsom resident Edward Nutter. “We spent a lot of effort to move the old meetinghouse in town, which was a church, and save it. We thought the town offices where the selectmen meet could be in the lower level of the meetinghouse.”

Harty explained that constructing a new building would be cheaper for the town in the long run, because the rent for the current building the town offices are in goes up by 3% each year.

“I think the town has to come together,” said Harty. “It is cheaper to build a brand new building than to rehab an old one. My thought is for the upper level [of the old meetinghouse] to be a historical association.”

The Selectmen’s Meeting on March 14th, the first after the election, was packed with concerned Epsom residents from both sides of the issue waiting to hear what the selectmen had to say over the failed article.

The meeting was held in the “temporary” town offices near the Epsom Circle. The offices are next to a children’s martial arts academy, and sounds of children screaming could be heard through the walls of the offices right before the start of the meeting.

“We really need to get out of here,” remarked newest town selectman Chris Bowes.

The three Epsom selectmen, Don Harty, Chris Bowes, and Hugh Curley discussed election results at the meeting, mainly covering Article 1.

“It was certainly disappointing for those of us who worked on the committee,” said Harty, in front of the public in attendance. “Sometime down the road we’ll have to address where to go from here.”

The other two selectmen agreed with Harty, but wanted to wait a little while before addressing the issue again.

“I think at this point let the dust settle,” said Bowes. “Let emotions calm down and address it in a couple weeks.”

The question on many residents mind is what will happen next? Will Article 1 be on the ballot again next year?

“I suspect they will try to figure out how to do it again, how to get the people to vote for it,” said Nutter.

“My feeling is that we cannot continue to rent because it is not fair to the tax payers in town,” said Harty.