JUNE 2021

Wilmot Town News

World War II veteran Al Houle at the Memorial Day celebration on May 29. It was also the 101st anniversary of the Soldiers Monument. (Photo: Mary Fanelli)

Schamberg: new chair of the BOS

May 19, 2021 meeting

The Wilmot Select Board has selected a new chair. Tom Schamberg, who has been a board member for six years, became the chair, succeeding Gary Palumbo, who led the board for two years.

Nick Brodich served as chair for four years before Palumbo and Doug Long served before that.

When Selectman Chris Wells was elected two years ago there was an agreement that each board member would serve as chair in rotation.

In the past, some chairs, like Earle Chandler, served for decades.

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With the end of pandemic restrictions, the board and the town clerk/tax collector, Lisa Lamson, discussed meeting protocols and town office operations going forward.

Lamson said that many people have appreciated the appointment system that was adopted during the pandemic to avoid having people wait in line in the small foyer in front of the clerk's window.

Lamson proposed that the front of the town office be unlocked Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., but appointments will be strong suggested for TC/TC services.

The late hours on Tuesdays and open hours on the last Saturday of the month will be discontinued because neither Avitar, the town's online software processor, nor the state DMV are open during those hours. Therefore there services are not available to the TC/TC or the public.

All renewals of DMV documents can be done online, placed in the drop box in front of the town office building, or sent through the mail.

The minutes from the meeting state: "Most important item we wish to share with the public is that staff are here to serve, answer questions and assist in any way possible. We seek to be very accommodating to residents' needs to conduct business with the town. Any changes we may be making take into consideration the value of residents' time and our efforts to complete tasks in the shortest amount of time, smoothly and efficiently. We always welcome your constructive feedback."

Pre-COVID hours were 22 per week and the last Saturday added 3 more. Post-COVID the town office will be open 21 hours per week and in addition staff we be available as needed.

A sign on the front door of the town office asks those who are unvaccinated to wear a mask inside. Vaccinated residents do not need to wear a mask.

June 2, 2021 meeting

The Town of Wilmot does not have a building inspector. In strict observance of the statute, the town should therefore not be issuing "building permits" per se. Consequently, the name of the form has been changed to a "zoning compliance certificate."

All of the rules remain the same. Contractors are responsible for meeting building codes in one– and two-family home construction. All other construction is under the purview of the state fire marshal's office. It is in one's self interest to meet code as getting insurance or a loan would be difficult without proof of having done so.

Bandstand Concerts

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July 10 | Ferns Family Band
July 17 | Nick's Other Band
July 24 | Cheryl Arena Band
July 31 | Mink Hills Band

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August 7 | Lindsey Schust/Ragged Mtn.
August 14 | Honest Millie
August 21 | FondTones

Variance Granted for Barber/Salon

June 14, 2021

After an hour-long public hearing, the zoning board of adjustments discussed a proposed variance for a half-hour before deciding to grant it with conditions.

Russ Jewell, a member of the zoning board who recused himself from the deliberations, proposed converting the former residence at 7 NH Route 11 into a barbershop and salon. Because the parcel is in the residential zone, this purely commercial use required a variance. The house was judged to be too small to accommodate both a residence and a business and therefore qualify for a cottage industry, which is allowed without a variance.

Jewell, who was represented by attorney Corey Giroux of New London, argued that the 0.5-acre parcel, which is bisected by the easement of the high-tension transmission lines, is more suited for a business than a residence.

Jewell's family once owned both this parcel and the one adjacent, the site of his father's excavating business. He wishes to sell the parcel with the house on it, but run his own excavating business out of the building on the adjacent parcel. This too, he said, made 7 NH Rt. 11 less desirable as a residence.

Because only three zoning board members were present, Elizabeth Harper, who is the chair, Judith Hauck, and Susan Ware had to vote unanimously in order for the variance to be granted.

The variance was to be awarded based on "unnecessary hardship." In this context hardship is not related to the financial means of the property owner. Giroux argued that unique attributes of the property made it difficult to use it in conformity with the existing zoning. He noted it was the only residence in town built within 100 feet of the transmission lines.

Abutter Peter Johnson lives between the Andover line and Jewell's house and in front of Jewell's maintenance garage. He was concerned that his property value would be diminished by the addition of the hair salon. Giroux argued that his property value was already impacted by the presence of the maintenance shed and would not be further affected by a salon that looked like a residence and was better maintained than it had been.

Dramatic reenactment of the origins of Decoration Day at May 29 event. (Photo: M. Fanelli)

During the board discussion, all three members were ambivalent about the hardship argument and moved onto the other three criteria to make a decision. Hauck did not think the variance would be contrary to the public interest, but Harper was concerned as to whether the "spirit of the ordinance" was being observed and the character of the neighborhood was preserved. Property clerk Bill Chaisson noted that retail was allowed on Rt. 11 in nearby Andover.

Harper decided that, as a condition on the variance, Jewell and subsequent owners would have to maintain a residential appearance. The plans presented show the building as outwardly resembling a private home and all parking in the rear.

Harper decided that allowing commercial use of this type at this lot represented a step away from the existing character, but did not produce the "sea change" that Giroux said was necessary to deny a variance.

The criteria of "substantial justice" tipped the scale. Citing the case of Malachy Glen Associates v. Town of Chichester, Giroux said is the public saw no "market-appreciable gain" by denying the variance, then the town was "visiting an injustice on the applicant."

Board members agreed that there was no gain for the community at large by denying the variance and granted it under the condition that it maintain a residential appearance and that the planning board set hours for the business that result in minimal impact on the abutting residential property owners.

Jewell must now go through site plan review at the planning board for both this property and the adjacent one. These hearings could take place as soon as Thursday, July 15. The planning board reviews all non-residential uses of property, regardless of which zone the property is in.

This hearing was conducted in person at the town offices, but was also viewable via Zoom. Going forward all zoning and planning board meeting will follow this hybrid model.