

## 📌 NOTICE BORED 📌

### Last chance for dog owners

OK, people, listen up! The Town Clerk is sick and tired of putting that ratty sign up in front of Town Hall every day reminding you that dog licenses are due. How many reminders do you need? The deadline is March 31, and she is not kidding! Haul your sorry butts in to Town Hall before then, pay your money, get the license, and nobody gets hurt.

After that, all bets are off.

### Mild weather forces calendar changes

Due to the preternaturally warm weather, Harvard's annual Apple Blossom Festival, normally held on Mothers Day weekend, will be held in April this year, the weekend before Annual Town Meeting. Memorial Day will be moved from late May to mid-May, and Harvard's



Fourth of July will be held in June.

Independence Day festivities will actually be enhanced by the revised schedule: Following the traditional parade, float-judging, pie-eating contest, and firemen's muster, the whole town will gather to enjoy Bromfield's graduation ceremonies.

### New tax work-off plan

In addition to the very successful tax-workoff program for residents over age 60, the town has announced a new work-off program for people in all age groups. These opportunities are intended to give disgruntled townspeople a chance to test their deep conviction that they could do the job much better than the public employees they scorn. Opportunities for 2012 include:

- Town Administrator
- Superintendent of Schools
- Police officer (2 openings)
- Building Inspector
- Snowplow operator

Don't call ahead; just show up, ready to work.

## Candidates face tough new campaign questions

Like candidates for political office nationwide, Harvard candidates will face a much more complicated campaign climate this year. In place of the usual hard-core questions about town issues at the traditional League of Woman Voters Candidates Night, this year's hopefuls will encounter queries aimed at gauging their adherence to cultural norms.

Does Lucy Wallace drive a pickup truck? If so, what make, model, and year? Gas or diesel? Does it have a current inspection sticker? Any rust?

What model Prius does Rhonda Sprague drive? How many solar panels does she have on her house? What about Wallace?

Has either ever tied a dog to the top of her car? Has either redecorated her home or office using public funds?

It used to be that a working knowledge of Harvard's Master Plan, Devens issues, or the zoning bylaws would be enough to gain credibility as a viable candidate, but not

anymore. Now voters also need to know if the candidates—particularly for the office of Selectman—have the necessary physical, mental, and ethical qualifications.

- Can they throw a punch?
- Can they take a joke?
- Can they clean a fish?
- Do they believe in evolution? Creationism? Intelligent design? All?
- Do they have any martial arts training?
- Who talked them into running? What was the pitch?
- Do they floss regularly?
- Do they recycle? Have they ever put recyclables in the trash compactors?
- What's the best thing they ever got at the take-it-or-leave-it area?
- Where do they buy pizza?
- Have they ever been wrong about anything?
- What makes them laugh?
- And perhaps most telling: Who are they mad at?

## Town Hall collapses; Selectmen split on escape plan

Harvard's iconic Town Hall has a much reduced footprint this week after the whole back section collapsed Tuesday night during an unusually contentious Selectmen's meeting. Surprisingly, there were no serious injuries, partly because most board members had earlier climbed under their rock-solid conference table to escape chairs and other objects being hurled at them from the audience. And the audience was already on its collective feet, in handcuffs, being escorted out of the building by riot police.

As the steaming pile of rubble settled in the frigid night, astonished bystanders detected what has become a familiar—and increasingly irritating—clamor emanating from the ruins: the Selectmen embroiled in

a heated argument—about escape routes this time. Eventually, the board voted 3 to 2 to stay under the table and snipe at each other until rescue arrived.

“Structurally speaking, it was a wise decision,” said one tired rescuer as he devoured a five-course meal prepared and rushed to the scene in 17 minutes flat by Chef Paul. “That conference table was far and away the strongest, most durable thing in that part of the building. One could argue that the table saved Harvard's town government.”

A discussion about that very thing is on the agenda for the next Selectmen's meeting, just after a scheduled dispute about a hotly contested plan to encase the remainder of Town Hall in duct tape.



The foundation of the new elevated parking area at the town beach was formed from tons of toxic material excavated from the pond. The tent was erected to provide meeting space during Town Hall renovation. (Courtesy photo)

## Pond parking area to get new look

When the town beach opens in a month or two, beachgoers will be in for a huge surprise. This year's annual drawdown of Bare Hill Pond was accompanied by a major dredging of the primary benthic ecosystem from the swimming area. Many tons of organic material were removed and de-watered in the parking lot, forming the foundation for an exciting new elevated parking area and water slide. Elevated parking had not been part of the original plan, but the excavated material turned out to be so filled with toxic matter that it must be encapsulated as quickly as possible.

“We had planned to truck it out of here and dump it downwind and far away,” said an excavation contractor on site. “New Hampshire, actually, but we couldn't find anyplace that would take it.”

Asked if any interesting artifacts had been found in the muck, the filth-spattered contractor seemed a little evasive. “Nope, just muck,” he muttered. “Muck, muck, and more muck. It's pretty much muck all the way down, right? And turtles. Nothing else.”

Since when are turtles toxic? So equipped with nose plugs and hip boots, this reporter waded into the slime to investigate and found clear evidence of a lost but reasonably advanced civilization. Along with the

expected mix of flip-flops, broken sand toys, and sunscreen bottles, the first layer contained a surprising number of Crocs, which turn out to be superlative turtle nests. There were first-generation cell phones the size of toasters, skate guards and ice fishing gear from the pre-global warming era, and sheared teeth from the weed harvester cutter bar. But nothing really nasty.

There had to be something, though, so a week later the research team first fortified itself with a sampling from the \$5 “Harvard Press Staff Favorites” wine section at the General Store. With better hip boots this time (rated for presidential election year research), we waded into the putrid layer said to represent the most noxious mass of excavated matter. Here was a nutrient-rich, foul-smelling layering that seemed to suggest a cycle in which every four years, on average, mud had been scooped up by handfuls, slung about in a violent fashion, and resettled. Some of this muck had been raked and wrapped in newspaper editorial pages before settling, and recent layers were laced with bitter invective, sour grapes, and what appeared to be an abundance of carp.

It was nasty, all right, and awfully close to the town well. But it could be a perfect site for temporary town offices.

## FinCom edicts alarm experts

Chastened by the failure of its February edict unilaterally banning cable television cameras from its meetings, the Finance Committee has decided to try a new tactic. Notoriously camera-shy, FinCom members have been brainstorming alternatives that could meet the requirements of the state open-meeting law and still provide the privacy they seek. Under state law, their meetings must be posted well in advance, held in a public place with handicap access, and be open to the public, including those who might wish to film or otherwise record the proceedings. But there is no requirement as to the size of the meeting space, so one option might be to hold their meetings in the town vault, an easy walk from Town Hall. Another option in mild weather might be the MART van parked nearby, which has the additional advantage of being mobile for a quick getaway if necessary. Still a third option would be to continue meeting in the Town Hall meeting room, but without electricity, which is not a state requirement due to the frequency of widespread power outages in the commonwealth. These options would also apply to Capital Planning and Investment Committee meetings.

“Harvard's Finance Committee and Capital Investment and Planning Committee have been engaged in momentous work, struggling desperately to hold things together in a small town that might seem rich and privileged by Worcester County standards, but is a hardscrabble

place when compared with communities like Concord, Lincoln, or Wellesley,” said a sympathetic local finance consultant. “These are not folks who do their best work with somebody peering over their shoulders, and they are well within their rights to insist on comfortable workplace conditions.”

But several area mental health experts see the FinCom's actions as possible evidence of a condition known as Early Recovery Denial Disorder (ERDD), which can produce alarming symptoms in fiscally conservative sufferers. Experts describe the condition as “not really paranoia, but close,” as victims strive to maintain the attitudes and beliefs that sustained them through the recession, in the face of growing evidence that things are improving, and many people are beginning to think they're nuts. In the case of the Finance Committee, experts say the condition may be triggered by an acute identity crisis as budget surpluses mount after an exceptionally mild winter.

Here they are, awash in an unforeseen windfall, with thousands of dollars budgeted but unspent for snow removal and heat, faced with the terrifying prospect that townspeople might begin to reject the doomsday scenario that's guided budget deliberations for many years now.

“What if the voters don't see the point in nickel-and-diming every department or capital request this year?” mused the expert. “It's their worst-case scenario.”