

FIRST SELECTMAN COLUMN

06/22/23 ISSUE DATE

What a pleasure it was to witness the graduation of our Sherman eighth-graders last week in an outside ceremony under perfect skies. Sherman Board of Education Chairman Matt Vogt served as keynote speaker and spoke excellently and other

terrific messages were voiced by Principal Mary Fernand and Superintendent Pat Cosentino. The Town of Sherman is very proud of its graduates and we look forward to their progress as they move on to high school.

The Board of Selectmen's regularly scheduled monthly meeting is this Thursday on June 22 at 7pm in Mallory Town Hall. The agenda is a full one and is posted on the Town website. We will be discussing, among many other items, several Park and Recreation concerns. For one, we have budgeted for a new part-time position as assistant Park and Rec Director. The commission will be presenting us with a final job description and then we will be going forward with the hiring process. This position is in addition to our current director and will be added to help supplement our current program offerings, possibly expanding programming for both seniors and adolescents.

We will also be getting the ball rolling on constructing pickle ball courts. The national wave of interest in this user-friendly sport is something that our Park and Rec Commission wants to advance here in Sherman. I agree and hope that we can realize this as soon as possible. The Board of Selectmen will be also discussing how to further our application with the FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) for more docks to accommodate more boaters with dock slips as per Park and Rec's request. FERC is the agency that controls many aspects of Candlewood Lake including boat docks and other water/shore uses.

Since I wrote about this last week, several Sherman residents have reached out to me about the various versions of state legislation under the description of the "Fair Share" bill. These bills concern affordable housing and the desire by some state legislators to mandate affordable housing regardless of what Towns have already achieved organically toward this effort and regardless of our zoning, environmental concerns, and our ability to provide waste and water services to large housing units. It is proposed with good intentions, but in practice is a thoughtless one-size-all "solution" that will solve nothing and decimate our towns. The bills forwarding this proposal have all failed, but now there is a bill on the table to "study" the issue. This bill may have already passed. It's very difficult to tell. I'm, again, concerned.

Consider this for Sherman: if the mandate of Fair Share were to have come to fruition it would have forced Sherman to produce 130 to 200-plus housing units. If these units were not built in an acceptable timeframe by private developers – absent of our own zoning and wetland regulations – then the Town would be responsible for building them. Now, in Sherman, we have a total budget – School (66%) and Town (34%) – of about \$15 million. I'm not a developer but if the Town had to build 150 housing units on its own (accessory apartments don't count with the State, folks) my guess is that it would triple our budget. How would tripling your tax bill make Sherman more affordable, especially for seniors on fixed incomes and young families? It wouldn't.

Another wrinkle in all of this is that we are in the middle of trying to renovate/repair our Sherman School. We apparently, according to the information right now, will receive a higher disbursement from the state towards this project if we *reduce* our school building's square footage. This has to do with a state formula of square footage per student population. So: the state incentivizes that we reduce the size of the school but then promotes legislation that significantly adds to the school population. Are you following this?

I'm not an alarmist by nature and certainly don't want to unnecessarily stir the pot of distress. But this is, unfortunately, real. The problem is that there is a need for more affordable housing in Connecticut. But addressing that need requires some clear and careful thinking. Sherman is a leader in this state with regard to careful land use policy and I'd hate to see that usurped through bad legislation.



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TOWN OF SHERMAN