

VILLAGE VIEW

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Who's watching the store?

Many of us taxpayers hoped, when we learned we'd have professionals running the town's recently formed Department of Public Works, to see improvements in the way the town of Barnstable operates. From all appearances, the reverse is true. Weekly we read of one foul-up or problem after another. Each one costs us taxpayers money.

When the DPW pros find sand in the new sewer beds isn't the right size and shape, the delay and litigation costs us money. Taxpayers can't help wondering why the sand wasn't inspected, and rejected, before such large quantities of non-conforming grains were dumped into the filter beds.

Who was watching the store?

When the DPW pros announce publicly that town employees will no longer be using town-owned vehicles to drive to and from work, but only on the job, taxpayers were relieved to hear it. Taxpayers who don't work for the town aren't provided with vehicles at the expense of the town to commute between homes and jobs.

And yet, we still see police cruisers parked (sometimes all day, sometimes most of a weekend) in private driveways of policemen. Now it's possible these particular officers work nights; it's also possible we have plenty of cruisers patrolling and those sitting in private drives for hours on end aren't needed. But at Town Meetings earnest pleas for more money for more cruisers. The going price is around \$10,000 each. At such a price, shouldn't every one be on duty around-the-clock?

These are only appearances, of course; there may be good reasons for under-utilized police cruisers. But is anyone watching the store?

Appearances of other things around town are equally distressing. The appearances of our roadsides, for example, disturb taxpayers. There's more litter along the roadsides, this spring, than we've ever seen before; in previous years roadside trash was an eye-sore. This year only the blind can fail to be offended.

The DPW pros are doubtless devoting most of their attention to the larger issues such as who is responsible for overseeing the construction of the proposed new police station, sand in the sewer beds, and other vital projects. Who's watching the litter, besides taxpayers?

The appearance of the recycling center at the town dump, and the concern (or lack of it) on the part of the DPW pros for supporting this effort to reduce litter, save space in the disposal area, give taxpayers opportunities to recycle waste materials, and encourage our throw-away society to correct bad habits is another disturbing sight.

Many of us are still attempting to recycle newspapers, glass and aluminum. We'd like to recycle all metal cans, as well, but the recycling center no longer has a market for such waste metal and takes only aluminum, glass and newspapers.

Our town's DPW shows little interest in maintenance of the recycling center and even less in continuing to support recycling. The reasons for this professional stand are obscure. Perhaps they're not receiving in-put from taxpayers and are unaware of what townspeople want.

Should that be the case, it may be well for individual taxpayers to inform the DPW of their wishes. It's beyond belief that tax-payers don't want to see Barnstable's roadsides cleaned up. Don't make a special trip, but next time you've an errand taking you within a radius of two miles of the dump, look around you.

There are the trees and bushes, festooned with shreds of plastic. There are the lady-slippers poking up tender green shoots through broken glass, rusting cans, old bleach and milk bottles, and assorted cardboard and plastic cartons.

There are the greening grasses growing up through the beer and soft-drink bottles and cans, tossed or dropped from trucks or tailgates, passenger cars and private trailers, hauling trash to the dump. It doesn't all come from dump-bound vehicles, of course. A lot is simply heaved out windows by whomever has finished his one-for-the-road while on-the-road.

And this isn't all. With time and weather, the highway lines are badly faded; at intersections such as Old Stage Road and Route 28, left-turn-only lanes and arrows are barely discernable. As summer tourists traffic swells next month, Route 28, already over-burdened with local year-round traffic, will become a stop-and-go bumper-to-bumper nightmare.

Highway markings painted on the street have helped reduce confusion at a number of intersections for several years. They have another advantage: they can't be stolen. Unless the lines are repainted, however, we'll be right back where we were before they were first introduced.

The situation will be compounded during the summer. Local traffic is even heavier now than tourist traffic was a few years ago. All those new houses taxpayers have watched abuilding throughout the town add at least one additional car for each residence, every day.

Who's tending the store? Anybody?

What can taxpayers do about it? We've several options. We can register complaints; we can ignore it, live with it, and hope and pray it's not our car that gets rear-ended while waiting to make a left turn; or we can move away from the Town of Barnstable.

Being a DPW pro isn't an enviable job; most taxpayers wouldn't want to sit in the seat any one of them occupies. None of them has been forced to take the position, however. The job does include more than engineering the sewer beds and supervising the new police station, no matter how much more interesting those aspects may be.

Perhaps before the DPW asserts itself to assume greater responsibilities, it should see to it that the responsibilities it already has are being adequately fulfilled.

Barnstable taxpayers deserve all-around better service than the DPW is providing in the several areas called to your attention.

It's almost too easy to rush past the trash on the roadsides and look the other way; it's almost too easy not to notice the police cruiser parked long hours at the rear door of a police officer's home; it's almost too easy not to realize the highway markings have weathered away and need restoration for our own safety and protection, as well as that of summer visitors who are often woefully unfamiliar with our highway system and traffic patterns.

It's almost too easy, too, to shrug off the recycling programs, to assume it was a flash-in-the-pan, unworthy of continuance. If recycling weren't worth continuing, would Alcoa Aluminum be paying 20 cents a pound for aluminum collected and turned in? If it's not worth continuing, would Alcoa have donated to the U.S. Olympic Committee another penny for every pound it's bought back? The Olympic Committee has been enriched by more than \$135,000 through Alcoa's program. That means more than \$2,295,000 has been paid for recycled aluminum--if we're to believe Alcoa's advertising.

A pound of recycled aluminum saves 95% of the energy needed to make new metal from bauxite. Barnstable can profit from recycling not only aluminum, but glass. At times recycled newspaper is more profitable than at other times, but the recycling program as a whole is worth continuing if only to extend the life of the dump.

Apparently the DPW pros are unaware townspeople are concerned. Why don't we let them know that taxpayers, at least, are still watching the store?