

Subject: Change Can Be Good
August 21, 2023

I fired my large kiln this weekend in preparation for the Village Square Art Show that begins on Saturday. I have been making pots since 1968, and after getting out of the Army in 1972, I thought that if I were a real potter, I would have to make my own kiln, process my own clay, and create my own glazes. I achieved those goals.

When Sallie and I moved to Highlands in 1999, I proceeded to set up a new ceramic studio. I built my fourth kiln in my ceramic career. It has been my pride and joy for the past 21 years and has always provided reliable service.

This weekend I loaded the kiln as always and began the firing process. To my surprise, one of the gas burners was misfiring. These burners have a safety system, and I keep them calibrated for a specific firing cycle. Or at least I thought so. When I witnessed the malfunction, I knew I had to take action, although I was reluctant to take the burners apart to troubleshoot the problem.

When I disassembled my old reliable burners, I immediately discovered the problem with the one that was malfunctioning. A build-up of rust and corrosion in the burner orifices and a dirt dubber nest in the housing were the culprits. I cleaned both burners and reset them on the kiln. To my amazement, they fired with amazing efficiency putting out a new, beautiful blue flame. I realized that over the period where that corrosion developed, I was unaware of the gradual decline in the burners' power and efficiency.

What does this have to do with town governance? Well, sometimes, it is good to step back, be willing to take things apart and reassess what is being done. Like my burner problem, elected officials may sometimes suffer from a gradual, almost imperceptible complacency.

At the last town board meeting, commissioners and the mayor made a major change in the way we have been doing things for decades. The decision was to jettison the system of board committees in favor of a new workshop model. Not that the committee system was wrong, but this new workshop system may be better for communicating among ourselves and citizens about town issues. The workshop process may be more dynamic in addressing town issues.

The committee system involved complicated challenges in scheduling and informing the public of the meetings. Also, the committees of three members always meant two of our five commissioners would be out of the loop. Our new town attorney recommended considering going to an inclusive workshop model to review issues before taking official action.

The new workshop format will have several potential benefits. Workshop sessions will begin at 6 pm before each monthly town board business meetings. All commissioners will be present, and the public will have routine and consistent access to the sessions. Normally there will be no votes or final actions taken, and if needed, the issue will be placed on the agenda of the board meeting for the following month. That policy does not preclude actions that may require an immediate response or the option to call for a special meeting during the month.

I am optimistic that the workshop format will be a much better system, and I applaud the board for being willing to embrace a new system. I see a number of town challenges that can be

better addressed in the workshops. Development, room tax distributions, utility upgrades, and funding priorities are just a few things that may be reviewed in the coming year.

On another subject, the August Community Coffee with the Mayor will be held on Friday at 11 am at the Hudson Library. I hope you can join us or come by my tent at the art show this weekend. I would love to show you the results of my kiln firing or talk with me about town stuff. I have always worn multiple hats.