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Dalton Planning Board, Conservation Commission Survive Town Vote

Dubreuil Defeats Foundation In Select Board Race

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The petitioned articles to abolish the Dalton Planning Board and Dalton Conservation Commission were rejected during Tuesday's town vote. (Contributed photo)

Two petitioned articles seeking to abolish the Dalton Planning Board and Dalton Conservation Commission were rejected at Tuesday's town meeting vote.

Article 2, the planning board article, which went to an all-day ballot vote, failed 131-192.

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Article 14, the conservation commission article, which went to the evening business portion of the town meeting, failed by about the same margin in a secret ballot vote of 63-96.

The conservation commission question saw a 50-minute discussion.

Abolish supporter Scott Kleinschrodt called the commission a “captured board” that works only for Forest Lake residents.

Abolish supporter Pam Kathan said the commission focuses on only one issue.

Both petitioned articles stem from the division in Dalton that has been brewing for several years regarding the proposed Casella Waste Systems landfill beside Forest Lake State Park.

Some supporters of the landfill are supporters of eliminating the planning board and conservation commission. Some have singled out conservation commission chairman Jon Swan, a vocal opponent of the proposed landfill, as a reason to get rid of the commission.

They said the planning board and conservation commission can be reestablished with new members.

Minutes into the debate on Article 14, Kleinschrodt called for a vote, which Kathan seconded.

“I don’t believe everyone has had a chance to speak at this point,” said Town Moderator Jay Ennis. “The discussion is open.”

“We were advised by our lawyer that the decision of the town meeting controls all proceedings, it controls your decision,” said Jim Dannis, a supporter of both petitioned articles. “It decides whether or not a vote is called ... It can overrule your decision to take discussion. We have moved to call the vote. We can vote to overrule the moderator’s decision to have discussion.”

Some residents objected.

“I don’t agree with you,” town legal counsel Walter Mitchell said to Dannis. “The moderator’s job is to give everyone a chance to speak to this. Yes, the body can overrule his effort and shut down the discussion, but right now there is no motion on the floor.”

Dannis, who said the only way to “cleanse the town of this division” is to abolish this board, made the motion to end discussion and move to vote. Kleinschrodt seconded it.

The motion failed 48-90.

In the 35 minutes that followed, the majority of residents, including some conservation commission members, spoke in favor of keeping the commission, which they said protects the town’s natural resources and the community’s quality of life.

“It’s a volunteer board,” planning board chairman Carl Lindquist said of the conservation commission. “I appreciate folks in town who put in volunteer time who are not getting anything out of it other than their own civic duty. Words like ‘abolish’ and ‘cleanse’ are incredibly strong words to put together against a conservation commission. I really struggle to see the need to abolish a volunteer committee like this.”

To applause, Lindquist suggested that residents with ideas for the commission attend meetings and offer their ideas.

Commission member Ernie Hannaford said one thing the commission is working on is a natural resources inventory, which will be completed this year.

Other residents said abolishing a group that is working to improve the town will not be helpful.

Resident Doyle Davis said New Hampshire has 221 communities and 13 cities that have conservation commissions, which complete natural resource inventories, review wetland permits and local ordinances related to conservation, and have no power to enact regulations, issue permits, conduct enforcement, or enter private property with permission.

“I feel a need to address some erroneous statements made by Mr. Dannis with regard to current commission,” said resident Karen Crowe. “He claims that this current commission is not dealing with conservation issues other than the single one he refers to [Douglas Ingerson Jr., whose property Casella has an option to purchase]. That’s not true ... He said this board is stacked with people with their own agenda. I say the previous board was stacked with those individuals and that’s why they don’t exist any longer. I think we have people dedicated to the well-being of this town.”

Nancy Comeau, vice-chair of the commission, said the landfill issue is just one issue and the conservation commission is involved in a number of projects.

“We protect the natural resources of the town,” she said. “The Dalton Conservation Commission is active and doing what they’re supposed to be doing.”

Other residents said the commission acts to preserve the town’s future and protect property values, the environment, and the health of residents. Some commission members noted that the annual town cleanup day, spearheaded by the commission, is nearing.

“I believe it’s my civic duty to help out my town,” said commission member Ruth Duval. “There’s a lot that we do. We work hard to clean up the town.”

While keeping the planning board, Dalton residents, in a 187-133 vote, approved Article 4, another petitioned article to have all planning board members elected in a town-wide vote as opposed to being appointed by the Select Board, which has been the practice until now.

In the race for the one open three-year seat on the Dalton Select Board, Tom Dubreuil defeated Cathy Fountain in a 174-157 vote.

In the race for town moderator, Pam Kathan defeated Ennis in a 169-152 vote.

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