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## Dorset grappling with water, noise bylaws

Posted Thursday, October 26, 2017 7:51 pm

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DORSET — As Dorset continues to grapple with two prominent political issues, the town's water district bylaws and a proposed noise ordinance, equitable dialogue and community compromise have proven a valuable method of governance, according to town leaders.

Though Linda Joy Sullivan — who represents Dorset alongside Danby, Peru, and Landgrove in the state legislature — considers herself "just an interested bystander," she says the discussion can pave the way for a larger conversation in Vermont.

"I think Dorset has before it a terrific opportunity to address two difficult issues in a way that will place greater emphasis on community wide solutions over strictly local fixes," Sullivan said. "Here, I am referring to the challenges that led to the Dorset Water District's recent bylaw changes, as well as to the Select Board's decision last week to defer action on a proposed noise ordinance."

Water District Bylaw changes

passed 'almost unanimously'

Topping the political agenda for the Dorset community are recent changes to the town's water district bylaws, aiming to increase equity among residents and allow for much needed repairs.

"The water division is an enterprise fund; those that are connected and use water pay for the maintenance and operations of the water system in Dorset Village," said Dorset Town Manager Rob Gaiotti. "Recently, a few users have dropped off the system by drilling private wells. This is problematic for the water division because it decreases the amount of users, making costs rise for everyone."

To address those rising costs, the town of Dorset recently passed — almost unanimously — a set of changes to the water division of the town's Fire District bylaws.

"The water division needs a predictable and reliable revenue source as they move forward to plan and construct improvements," Gaiotti said. "The bylaw change will allow the water division to continue to collect water fees from the existing 178 users to help fund future planning and improvements."

"The town could probably saddle the [approximately] 180 property owners connected to the system with paying the entire freight of fixing the system," Sullivan noted. "It could also, however, choose to spread out at least some of the cost to properties across the district."

According to the legislator, finding a more equitable solution might prove beneficial for the Dorset community overall.

"I think there is significant sentiment among community leaders that what's good for the infrastructure of the village ultimately benefits the entire town and all of its residents, and that some reasonably proportional contribution by residents not connected to the system might be appropriate," Sullivan said. "The current discussion around creating equitable financing solutions is very healthy."

Another consideration is the cost of repairs to the aging water system, as well as increasing the water supply year-round.

"The town's system is very badly in need of infrastructure investment," Sullivan said. "Property owners connected to the system are now facing not only seasonal water shortages, but are under a state-imposed moratorium on building within the district."

According to Gaiotti, changes to the bylaws will prove beneficial as the water system moves forward.

"The Fire District Prudential Committee deserves lots of credit for progress made in the past 18 months. The water division will be drilling a well to add supplemental water to the system," he said. "They will then work through a hydraulic study of the system and plan out improvements. They've received \$40,000 in engineering grants from the state of Vermont, to assist in the process."

"I believe that the Prudential Committee is really making great progress towards finding alternative resources for additional water to ensure that the system has the water it needs throughout the summer and early fall months, when historically we've had water problems," said Selectman Henry Chandler. "The other issue is fixing a really aging water lines that feed each of the water users that are really deteriorating, and leaking a lot of water — at least over time."

A proposed Noise Ordinance tabled for now

Another prominent political issue in Dorset is a proposed noise ordinance, recently tabled by the Dorset Selectboard.

"Noise in Dorset is a concern of some of the people, especially in the Village," said Chandler. "We just held a public hearing on a noise ordinance that we've been working on for seven or eight months, so that's still a work in progress."

"Dorset currently does not have noise restrictions," added Gaiotti. "In the past, the Town had an informal rule that we asked for events to be finished by 11 p.m., meaning that after 11 p.m. the expectation was that there would be no noise that could disturb neighbors."

According to Gaiotti, the issue arose last summer when residents conveyed concerns about noise disturbances — particularly related to events like weddings held in the village — to the Dorset Selectboard.

"The Selectboard then began to work and look at options for controlling noise, and the board worked very hard to come up with options," Gaiotti said.

He noted that a public hearing on the noise ordinance was held on Oct. 17 where input was taken from all sides of the issue.

"After the hearing, the board discussed the issue at length and ultimately decided that a noise ordinance may be difficult to enforce and have unintended consequences," Gaiotti said.

"The Selectboard's decision to approach the issue from the standpoint of the entire community, and not of individual property owners, was laudable," Sullivan added. "Hopefully, here too, the Town can encourage and foster healthy community fixes at a local level over legislated mandates."

Though the noise ordinance remains a "work in progress," according to Chandler, Dorset's local government is well equipped to handle such issues.

"We have a great board of selectmen. Everyone is working really hard and we have a great town manager who we support, and he supports us," Chandler said. "We feel good about the work that we've accomplished, and hope to accomplish."

Overall, Sullivan hopes that larger state issues can be approached in a similarly measured and equitable fashion.

"If we strive to look thoughtfully at all of these big ticket issues in a fair, equitable and bipartisan way, we can come up with strong solutions that everyone can get behind," he said. "While that might mean not always listening to the loudest and most passionate voices, it's how, in my opinion, we need to get our business done."