



Letter from the President

The relatively easy winter of 2017 in Truro stood in sharp contrast to the whirlwind around us in national and international events. In some ways, the shifting and still unsettled sands of sentiment and policy are reflected in microcosm in recent and proposed choices made by voters and by Town officials. It was, from our perspective two steps forward, one step back.

Moat central, of course, is the Town budget: **Voters passed a budget for FY 2018 that on its face was slightly less than last year's budget: \$18.48 MM v \$18.70 MM in FY 2017**, representing an apparent reduction of 1.19% this year. But the voters also approved a \$465,000 "Prop 2 1/2" override and a \$3.7 MM debt exclusion for the replacement of the failing culvert on Town land at East Harbor. The override specifically increases next year's budget by \$465,000 - in other words, the override becomes a permanent part of the budget next year and beyond. In a sign of the times, the override barely passed, with a vote of 202-195. This not only has implications for future overrides, it also is relevant to the tax discussions underway.

The BIG Three Issues this Winter and Spring

Three big issues took center stage in town life and debate during the off-season in Truro: **zoning, accessory dwellings**, and **taxes**. On the first two the Town has made solid steps forward, and in a direction we have supported for a while. On the third – taxes – the Town is engaged with two major tax initiatives that have a big impact on part-time residents.

Zoning: At ATM, voters passed by supermajority (well over 2/3) an article limiting house size in the Seashore to a generous cap of 3,600 sf by right, and up to 6,000 sf by special permit if granted by the ZBA. They soundly rejected a hastily developed citizen's petition that would have sought to establish no caps apply anywhere in Town, under the guise of a "town-wide cap." Voters thus effectively re-confirmed the Seashore house size cap and deferred any decision on caps in the Town district until a full, public process of developing and discussing such a change could be put in place. More on this follows.

Accessory Dwellings: Voters also passed an article to encourage and permit accessory dwelling units on any lot in the Town. This could lead to much needed year-round, fair market rate rentals coming online that would greatly help moderate income households, young people and seniors on fixed incomes. But amazingly, the voters essentially adopted that every conforming residential lot in Truro can become a two-home lot - a principal residence and an accessory dwelling residence. This and other plain terms of the new bylaw are likely to generate many challenges in achieving this goal. For example, the septic requirements are stringent and the accessory unit must meet size and lot limits. Notably, homeowner's associations that are restricted to single family residences cannot be compelled to permit accessory dwelling units.

Taxes: The Town is engaged in two seemingly unrelated tax initiatives, both of which affect part-time residents to a great and greater extent. First, the Town has petitioned the State to exercise the

TNRTA ANNUAL MEETING 2017

July 1, 2017 | 10AM

MEETING HOUSE - First
Congregational Church

Town Hall Rd, Truro

local option to capture Room Rental Occupancy Taxes, a pass-through statewide tax that Truro property owners would be required to collect from renters of less than 90 consecutive days. Truro proposed a simple statement to exercise this option, but the State approach is more complicated than Truro intended to implement. The BoS has put its more measured case before the State at a hearing on June 12 in Barnstable. One way or another, this tax is likely to be imposed, and will require renters to add/include this tax in their rental fees.

The second tax initiative is the Residential Tax Exemption, also permitted by a state "home rule" law (adopted town by town). Simply put, this is meant to give all property owners who declare Truro to be their principal residence (and can prove this in specific ways) a 20% reduction in assessed value. The total amount of this exemption would be shifted onto part-time residents to maintain the same revenue base for Town operations. (Note the law allows up to 35%, so this tax shift could grow over time in both relative and absolute terms. Abetted by overrides, it could grow pretty fast!)

The Residential Tax Exemption is being presented as a way to address financial hardship among property owners who have high land values but modest income. If this is a true problem in

Town, we encourage a fair and open way to provide tax relief for any of our neighbors in need. But this exemption is not a means-tested tax reduction - on the contrary, the largest exemptions would benefit properties assessed between \$1.5 million and \$3 million. In fact, this is quite complex to implement and the simple arithmetic is misleading though seductive.

So, TPRTA has a committee studying the need, the law, the alternatives, the impact, and the precedents this would set in order to give the entire community

a chance to determine what is fair, fiscally sound, and helpful to those in need. We are also looking at how other communities have handled this, either supporting or opposing this exemption. (Cambridge, the most often cited user of this exemption, offers almost no comparison; other Cape towns have taken opposing pro and con positions, both of which we want to understand fully). Likewise, we will seek to understand – and encourage – tax relief opportunities for our neighbors in need, including use of numerous existing

abatements and the Assessor's discretionary authority to grant abatement.

All in all, it is a year to pay attention, become informed, and show up. We will hold our first discussion of the tax matters at our Annual Meeting on July 1. Details above. We hope to see you there!!

Best regards,

Regan McCarthy, President

Town Meeting / Town Vote

Normally, we provide an article-by-article summary of Town votes, but this year we want to highlight the items that generated big discussion or will have big impact.

The Budget

Just to re-cap: For FY 2018, voters approved an \$18.48 million budget with approval for a \$465,000 override and a \$3.7 million debt exclusion to repair the Town-owned culvert at East Harbor (Pilgrim Lake). This year, the budget went through as usual, with few comments except on a separate, related article on the override, which passed by only 7 votes. The override will pay for services such as a new part-time website and communications position in Town Hall, a special-needs placement, a program to fight opioid addiction and Head of the Meadow Beach lifeguards (the potential loss of lifeguards at Head of the Meadow Beach brought out passionate appeals to voters. The town saved the lifeguards, who can now save swimmers!) The Town's view on the budget is that we have a revenue problem. For the first time to our knowledge, voters said - and showed - that the Town "has a spending problem." The override is estimated to add approximately \$100 per \$500,000 in assessed value.

Truro Votes to Protect the Seashore District

This time last year, we wrote here about a great opportunity that Truro had - to adopt a generous house size cap in the Seashore district as a way to fulfill the Seashore's original intention and to preserve the Seashore from over-development. At ATM this year, voters passed this article by a super-majority, despite some pretty impressive efforts of another group of folks to undo it.

It is hard to convince anyone that ATM can be a knuckle-biter, but this particular article was a hair-raiser to the very end! There are many folks to thank and congratulate: the **Planning Board** (who took the time needed to develop the article with lots of good information and with input from public discussions); **Save Truro Seashores** (a core group of active taxpayers, both

full- and part-time, who developed and delivered a voter information program, held public meeting and discussions, canvassed and advanced a simple PR effort) and the Thomas Bena film, *One Big Home*, which told a compelling tale of the impact of mega-mansions on another Cape Cod community. TPRTA was proud to provide the financial and technical support needed to carry out the voter education effort.

At some point, Truro may want to take up the matter of house size restrictions in the Town district, which is a far more complex matter to address. We have supported this direction in the past, and hope the Planning Board takes it up in the near future.

More on Taxes

In addition to what has been included here, we have sent a rather detailed description of the proposed Residential Tax Exemption in a recent email blast. We will not repeat that here, but instead refer you to a recent post on the **TPRTA website** (www.tprta.org).

We have also given information in the past on the Room Rental Occupancy Tax, in addition to what is now reported. Here, however, we should start giving some thought to cumulative effect of the exemption, the overrides, and the occupancy tax. While the latter is not a tax on property owners, it nonetheless has a cost to property owners in time and potentially could reduce rental income to keep up with a competitive rental market.

Further, in combination, they may afford a perfect storm whose clouds would hide an increasing disparity in the next few years between what full-time residents and what part-time residents would pay in taxes. While appearing to apply the same tax rate, there in effect could effectively be two tax classes, where full-timers bear less of an impact on their taxes generated through overrides, and part-timers bear the greater burden through tax shifts.

At ATM, the Selectmen plainly stated that the Town needs to increase the capacity to levy taxes to generate revenues. This raises an interesting question: why not let the taxes generated for the town by renters paying the occupancy taxes (a considerable amount) be the basis for budget increases, and forget the discriminatory tax exemptions and the problematic overrides? This is a conversation to be continued.

Great Hollow Beach

The voters had a robust discussion on the merits of a small allocation (relative to the budget) of \$50K to acquire 267 feet private land to extend the 130 foot beach at Great Hollow. The petitioners will receive these funds if they succeed in generating at least this amount in 1:1 matching dollars.

Accessory Dwelling Units

The need for affordable units at fair market rental rates in Truro is unquestionable. We supported an accessory dwelling unit bylaw to bring the many units that now exist “under the radar” online by incentivizing tax savings. This went further than we expected, but let’s hope it does the job. Specifics of this article are worth noting. Highlights include a min-max unit size between 400 and 1,000 square feet, subordinate to (smaller than) the principal dwelling. No condos can be created as a result, once built. Annual or periodic inspection is required to establish use as year-round affordable units, and the costs of same belong to the property owner. Proof of year-round rental must be provided annually to the Building Commissioner. Qualifying ADUs may seek tax abatement.

To get a permit, the Planning Board (PB) must hold a public hearing within 65 days of filing the application; if the applicant’s paperwork is correct, a permit must be granted. There is no appeal before the Planning Board, though abutters have a right to appeal to the ZBA or the courts. Violators will be subject to fines and possible revocation of permits. ADUs may not be permissible in the Seashore, as the Seashore restricts properties to single family residences and anyone putting up an ADU risks revocation of the suspension of condemnation. Homeowners’ Associations that have or create covenants that limit properties to single family dwellings may preclude this use.

And, oh yes: the septic has to conform to Title V for the entire property; lot size regulations pertain to the total number of bedrooms allowed in both structures; and pre-existing, non-conforming lots need not apply.

Street Parking

The voters discussed at length a proposal to allow the Truro Police and (where applicable) the Beach Department to issue tickets for parking or vehicle use violations, as an alternative to the only enforcement option now available: towing. It is worth it to be informed about parking and driving rules going forward.

Nah

Two articles didn’t pass: a motion to preclude the Herring River Restoration Project to proceed unless they modified plans to ban herbicides in the project area (this lost because the project had already adopted such a motion) and an article to explore electronic voting at ATM (this was indefinitely postponed as a result of the entirely civil proceedings at ATM despite widely varying views of the voters on many issues). Go, Truro! It is a testament to the underlying sanity of this community.

Abbondanza!

TPRTA has supported the Truro Scholarship Fund for many years, with pride in the students who deserve this support. This year, for the first time since we began our contributions, FIVE scholarship winners were selected from an outstanding roster of graduates. These include **Rebecca Dawley**, pursuing a Chemistry major; **Maya Krieger-DeWitt**, pursuing studies in international relations; **Eva Kuchinski**, pursuing studies in Athletics training; **Hanna Roderick**, pursuing liberal arts studies at Brown University; and **Annabelle Silva**, pursuing studies in the arts and education. Congratulations!

Speaking of Sustainability

We recently came across a unique tool that helps to estimate water usage. It provides the user with a snapshot of how daily activities affect water use. The process involves answering a series of specific questions, each including informative bits of information. At the end, you will get an analysis with some useful tips for how you might use less. It's pretty eye-opening. Try it out yourself - the link is on the TPRTA website.

Stay Informed, Stay in Touch

You have let us know that you appreciate the timely, specific contacts we make throughout the year to keep you informed of important topics and events in Truro. So, we do not over-communicate, will never send spam or solicitations, and do not share contact info with anyone.

Rely on the TPRTA website

We post as needed, and suggest you check in on a regular basis - we usually post a few times a month. It also has resources and links for your use.

Reach us by email anytime

We rely on your thoughts, concerns, priorities and suggestions to set our course.

Snail mail works, too!

You can always write to us all year long at the address here.

Keep us informed

If you write to Town or other officials on a matter that affects Truro, feel free to send us a copy.

Put TPRTA into your contacts

That way our email – sent only when there is important news – does not go to spam.

Join TPRTA or Renew Your Membership Online at www.tprta.org
 OR: Send a completed membership form with dues to TPRTA. Dues are \$35 per household annually.
 Contributions appreciated.
 Thank you!



T R U R O
 P A R T - T I M E
 R E S I D E N T
 T A X P A Y E R S '
 A S S O C I A T I O N

P.O. Box 324 · Truro, MA · 02666
 tprta@tprta.org · www.tprta.org

Name(s) _____

Permanent Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

E-mail _____ Phone _____

Truro PO Box _____

Truro Zip Code _____

Truro phone _____

Dues	TPRTA Dues Enclosed:	\$35
*Contributions	To TPRTA: \$	
	To TEEA Scholarship Fund: \$	
Total Enclosed: \$		

*All contributions designated for the Truro Citizenship Scholarship Fund will go in full to TEEA



Spring/Summer 2017
NEWSLETTER

FIRST CLASS MAIL
 PRESORTED
 US POST OFFICE
 BOHEMIA, NY 11716
 PERMIT NO. 294

P.O. Box 324 · Truro, MA · 02666
 tprta@tprta.org · www.tprta.org

T R U R O
 P A R T - T I M E
 R E S I D E N T
 T A X P A Y E R S '
 A S S O C I A T I O N

