



Fairhaven Neighborhood News

A free publication of all things Fairhaven

Teeming with information you need.

(And some you don't need,
but will be glad you have anyway.)

*The little paper
with a big voice!*

7/20/17

Fairhaven Selectboard: Bob Espindola, Daniel Freitas, Charles Murphy
Fairhaven Town Administrator Mark Rees
Fairhaven Assistant to the Town Administrator Anne O'Brien
Via email

Hello Selectboard members, Anne, Mark,

I just found out today that our newspapers, along with all other independent, local publications have been moved from the lobby of the town hall front door to an obscure side entrance.

My understanding is that this was done because it looks better.

I find it mind boggling that the town would hide away the independent, free press, especially in this time of unprecedented attacks on independent reporting. I tried to find the spot where the papers have to go now, and I could not. I had to get the custodian to show it to me. I may not know every nook and cranny of our town hall, but I'm quite sure that I am more familiar with it than the average citizen. I'm also sure that I am more comfortable roaming around that large building by myself than the average citizen. Not only will people need a GPS to find us now, they will need a certain measure of courage and time. I spent more than five minutes trying to find the publications table.

I believe that the decision to hide away the local publications to a little-used side entrance, where they will not be automatically seen by the public, where it is nearly impossible to find them, is a policy decision, and, therefore, falls under the purview of the Selectboard. It should not be a unilateral decision made by a couple of town hall employees who clearly do not care about what the residents may want or need, but only care about how the hallway looks.

As for the look of the hallway, in my opinion, it looks cold and uninviting. Most town halls and other public buildings have billboards and brochure racks and piles of local publications for visitors to pick up and browse through. It welcomes the visitor to come in, take a moment, learn about our little spot in the world. It is ubiquitous in a free society. The variety of publications one finds when one travels to other municipalities speaks to the uniqueness of each place. It is one of the small pleasures we enjoy as a free society where people can simply hop in a vehicle and go from town to city and state to state. It is also an exercise of our First Amendment rights simply to create these publications. This decision takes away yet another of

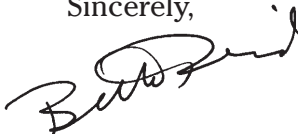
the little things that make our little town what it is.

Even more disturbing than this attempt to keep news away from the public, is that health information has also been purged from the front lobby: No Board of Health publications with information on ticks, opioid addiction, needle disposal sites, nothing. Business brochures have also been relegated to the hinterlands. I believe the Selelctboard had set a goal of being more business friendly. Moving brochures of local businesses away from the main lobby does quite the opposite. I also believe the board had a goal of increasing tourism. How, pray tell, is a tourist going to find any of the beautiful publications produced by the Office of Tourism if a local like me cannot even find them? I don't know about you, but when I travel to a new place, I look for the town hall and the visitors center to get information.

I find this decision to be perplexing at best. The fact that no one was informed is troubling. How does a decision like this, that affects every single taxpayer who walks through the door, get made without anyone knowing about it? How does a single town employee (or two) get to a point in his or her career as a public employee where he or she believes this decision is his or hers to make, unilaterally, without considering the consequences to the public? The reality is that these publications are there for a reason. They are not just thrown willy-nilly around. They may be free to the public, but they cost money to produce. To simply remove them as if they do not matter, without regard for those who are looking for them in order to read them, is dismissive, not only of those who produce these publications, but also of those who enjoy reading them.

I hope that the board will take up this matter at a meeting soon and that the town hall employees who made this decision will reverse course.

Sincerely,



Beth David, Editor

cc: Christopher Richard, Office of Tourism
Pat Fowle, Board of Health
Fairhaven Business Association