

Could some volunteer posts become appointed?

By Geoff Moore

Correspondent

Lincoln and other small towns are looking at the prospect of moving from elected to appointed officials in order to deal with the strain on local government imposed by outside pressures. Towns are also recognizing their inability to deal with such pressure without increased professionalism, in turn adding to the town's property tax burden.

That was a stark message that Sara Mattes had for her fellow members of the Board of Selectmen Monday, after attending the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) Annual Selectmen meeting on Oct. 14.

Mattes said in his opening remarks, MMA Executive Director Geoff Beckwith offered a cautionary note on this year's high-level of state aid. Beckwith said

growth in lottery income is flat and that the creep in reliance on property tax to fund local government is a trend he saw continuing, Mattes reported.

A perfect example of Beckwith's comments also happened at Monday's meeting, as the selectmen learned Treasurer/Tax Collector Neil Feinberg has proposed making his position an appointed one, rather than elected. Feinberg is expected to make this presentation to the selectmen and Town Meeting.

Town Administrator Timothy Higgins said since a law change in 1997, towns no longer need to go through the state Legislature to get the authority to make the conversion. Instead, the proposal must go to Town Meeting and then to the ballot, where it can be changed by majority vote. If the town accepts the change, then under the statute, the Board

of Selectmen would have appointing authority.

Higgins said Feinberg has an interesting vantage point and recognizes how increasingly complex the responsibilities have become. Higgins said the town and Feinberg are fortunate to have a professional assistant treasurer and collector who runs the affairs of the office. Higgins said it was his view and that of the Finance Committee that changing the treasurer/tax collector position to appointed would solidify the financial management team.

Gary Taylor reminded the selectmen that the board had talked about this change two years ago, but had deferred to the current treasurer/collector on the matter. Selectmen agreed to hear a proposal from Feinberg and the Finance Committee and to include it on the March Town Meeting warrant.

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