

EDITORIAL

Sunshine Week demands care

Newspapers all over the country celebrate Sunshine Week in March.

It's a celebration of freedom of the press. It's a celebration of the public's right to know.

The American Society of News Editors created the event just 15 years ago. At the time there were concerns being heard in the news industry about a virus of secrecy that was moving through the country.

The reason Sunshine Week happens in the middle of March is because March 16 was the birthday of James Madison.

Madison, as those who study history will remember, was the prime author of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

That is the amendment that guarantees our religious freedom and our right to free speech: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."

The founding fathers understood that a free press is a cornerstone of democracy.

We at the Milton Times need to take a minute to affirm our commitment to open government and democracy.

The mission of the Milton Times is to deliver information about the community — its government, its people, and the important events of the town.

We have been providing information about the community on the pages of the newspaper, on the website www.miltontimes.com, which we provide as a sample of our work, and on our free app, Milton Today.

We are fortunate in Milton because we have a well-educated population.

The 27,003 residents counted during the census 10 years ago deserve to know the good and not so good facts about our community.

We promise to continue working for the readers of the newspaper to uncover stories about how our local government works. We think it is important to be the local alternative to fake news.

Our staff works diligently to sift through hundreds of pages of government paperwork so that the important facts can be conveyed.

We thank our readers as well as town employees and officials who help us keep the community informed.

Cancellation

We have been planning a party to celebrate our 25th anniversary.

It was planned for May 1 at the Common Market in Quincy, but faced with the number of concerns about the spread of the coronavirus, we need to cancel the event.

When the Council on Aging canceled its St. Patrick's Day luncheon and town officials began talking about the steps they were beginning to take in order to contain the spread of the disease, it became apparent that we needed to take a second look at our plans.

We are still working on a booklet to commemorate the newspaper's silver anniversary. That booklet will be included as a supplement to the Milton Times this spring.

We have already begun refunding the individuals who bought seats at the dinner. We continue to thank those people and want to do the responsible thing and keep people safe.

— Pat Desmond
Milton Times publisher

Send letters to the editor to
editor@miltontimes.com
deadline is always Friday at noon
for the next week

A moment for levity



Edge Hill Road passers-by need not have worried about the bark or bite from these two stone figurines decked out for St. Patrick's Day. (Photo by Lisa D. Connell)

COMMENTARY

Thoughts about East Milton Fire Station problems and Milton's history

By John Cronin

Moving the East Milton Fire Station to a Precinct 6 Residentially Zoned neighborhood has recently been proposed by the Fire Station Building Committee.

Milton has a history of protecting its residential districts and preserving the "character of the town." Fire and police stations, a shopping mall, a mosque, the Jordan Marsh warehouse, and several 40B housing proposals have each been shunned or turned away.

A series of East Milton Fire Station study committees in 1937, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, and 1951 each sought a new site to replace the 1893 wood frame station in the business district.

The 1951 committee selected the Cunningham Park community garden site at Cedar Road. The Warrant Committee, the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, and Town Meeting all voted in support. However, the neighborhood objected, petitioning for a referendum which voted 1,418 Yes and 2,456 No, thereby killing the project.

Subsequently, a special Town Meeting was called and voted to build the current station on the site of the 1893 station in the East Milton business district.

A similar fate was encountered when a 1964 committee sought to relocate the Police Station from the Central Avenue Business District to the Residential Precinct 4 Walnut Street neighborhood.

Again, the site was approved by the Selectmen, the Planning Board, and the Warrant Committee. Town Meeting voted in favor but the neighbors petitioned for a referendum which voted Yes 2,665 to No 3,700 to annul that vote. A few years later, a new Police Station was built on town-owned land on Highland Street.

A 2020 proposal to locate a new station on St. Agatha Church property on Libby Road, the Arts Center on Edge Hill Road near Andrews Road, or the little park between Squantum Street and the Exit 10 off-ramp near California Avenue, all in residential neighborhoods, may encounter opposition, as in 1951 and 1965.

Residential neighborhoods are fiercely protected

in Milton. In June 1922, a developer proposed a strip mall in a residential area. A July Special Town Meeting was called and by a unanimous vote adopted the first zoning bylaw, restricting the entire town as exclusively residential, except the three railroad villages as business districts. Those same zone boundaries remain unchanged almost 100 years later.

The Select Board and the Planning Board have not been drawn into the 2020 change of site selection discussion and have not taken any votes. The Historic Commission has encouraged renovations of historic buildings where feasible. An assessment was made in 2012 to rehab the existing East Milton Fire Station by architects Drummey Rosane for an estimated \$3.2 million. This estimate no doubt will increase for inflation and additional features the Committee has sought.

The 1955 East Milton Station was built for Engine 2 and also a Ladder Truck which was decommissioned 30 years ago, vacating that bay. In designing the second floor, the architect wrote "There is room for future expansion should that be deemed necessary." The elaborate traffic light controllers for East Milton Square will be removed from the station's basement as part of the \$4 million new MassDOT project this year.

Boston Fire Station Engine 50 in Charlestown, built in 1918, has recently been renovated and modernized with "three zone air quality systems," steam showers, gear decontamination, kitchen relocation, and engine exhaust protection at a cost of \$3.8 million. It was similar to our East Milton Station.

Boston's Engine 51 in Oak Square in Brighton, built in 1913 with characteristics similar to East Milton, has also been renovated and modernized. The engine and crew were relocated to another station during the reconstruction.

The difficulty in finding a new site, the town's bonding and taxing capacity limitations, and the urgent need for classrooms for the unanticipated mushrooming of elementary school student enrollments will factor in the decision the town must make.

John Cronin is a retired Town Administrator.