

# Harpswell Bulletin

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## KEEP MAINE AND HARPSWELL HEALTHY

The Town of Harpswell extends its sincerest wishes for a healthy New Year to Harpswell residents and taxpayers as well as visitors to our community. Please take steps to minimize your risk of contracting or transmitting the coronavirus by following CDC guidelines: wear a mask when out in public, maintain social distance, wash your hands frequently, avoid gatherings of people outside of your household and quarantine if necessary. We have some difficult months ahead and ask that you do your part to keep Maine and Harpswell healthy.



## 2020 RE-CAP

With the exception of two and a half months, the Town Office building remained open to the public in 2020. The Recycling Center/Transfer Station facility was open throughout the year although there was some adjustment to its schedule. The Town Office and Recycling Center/Transfer Station anticipate remaining open to the public in 2021—this is subject to change depending upon public health circumstances. Although we are processing in-person transactions at the Town Office, we continue to encourage people to undertake business online, by mail or phone. In keeping with the Governor’s Executive Orders, all people who enter the office must wear a face covering. The Town will accommodate those unable to wear a face covering by conducting business by phone, mail or in the parking lot if necessary.

The in-person part of the 2020 March Town Meeting was canceled with the municipal budget being put before the voters in July at the same time as the school budget. The secret ballot vote did proceed on March 14, 2020 with Kevin Johnson being re-elected to the Board of Selectmen (3-year term); Erik Lusk (3-year term) and Frank Wright (1-year term) were elected as write-in candidates to the School Board. With respect to the July 2020 municipal budget referendum, voter participation was unusually high given that it was a Presidential Primary Year. All budget articles were adopted with a total of \$5,346,118 in appropriations, including Curtis Memorial Library which had been voted on by secret ballot in March. In August, the Board of Selectmen/Assessors established the mil rate of \$6.74, a less than 1% increase in the tax rate.

## 2021 ELECTION OF MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS AND BUDGET ADOPTION

The Board of Selectmen has set the election for municipal officials to be held on March 13, 2021. Voting will be by secret ballot, so voters will be able to vote by absentee ballot 30 days prior to March 13, 2021 and at the polls at Harpswell Community School on March 13. There will be no open Town Meeting in March 2021; the 2021 municipal budget will be voted on by secret ballot at the same time as the school budget, which is expected to be on June 8, 2021. The Town plans to mail its annual Town Report in the spring.



## HOW CAN WE HELP YOU OR YOUR NEIGHBORS?

The pandemic has challenged us like never before to look out for one another and to ensure that those who are most vulnerable have what they need to be safe, comfortable and healthy. We want to make sure that you and your neighbors know about the following resources:

**Food:** Mid-Coast Hunger Prevention Program holds a weekly food mobile open to everyone in the back parking lot at the Town Office on Mountain Road from 10-11:30am every Thursday. You can pick up food for your family or neighbors in need. In addition, MCHPP operates a food-pantry in Brunswick for eligible households. (Also, see Meals in a Pinch in the Harpswell Aging at Home section)

**Heating:** The Town has a Home Heating Assistance Program which you can apply for online at [www.harpswell.maine.gov](http://www.harpswell.maine.gov) or call the office at 833-5771 and we can take an over-the-phone application. Eligible households can receive up to 200 gallons of fuel or its equivalent in a winter season.

**General Assistance:** The Town also offers assistance to income-eligible households for basic necessities such as rent, food, utilities, etc. Please contact Linda Strickland at the Town Office, 833-5771, for more information.

**Health & Safety Checks:** At no charge the Town performs home health and safety checks. We want to make sure that you are healthy and safe in your home, so please contact Fire Administrator Art Howe at [ahowe@town.harpswell.me.us](mailto:ahowe@town.harpswell.me.us) or at the Town Office, 833-5771, for more information. (Also, see Seniors Connecting and Home Repairs in the Harpswell Aging at Home section)

**More Services:** Call 211 to reach a free, confidential information and referral service that connects people of all ages across Maine to local services. 211 Maine is based in Maine and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Whether it's financial assistance, domestic violence, addiction treatment, health care, mental health, or heating and utilities assistance, their specialists will talk to you to find out what you need and walk you through all the options to find the right service or program for you.

**HARPSWELL AGING AT HOME (HAH)** continues to offer the following programs and services:

- **Meals in a Pinch** provides and delivers meals to seniors who find it difficult to prepare meals or obtain food, or have health issues (themselves or their caregivers). For more information, or to request MIP, contact Julie Moulton at 330-5416 or [juliemoulton28@gmail.com](mailto:juliemoulton28@gmail.com).
- **The Home Repairs Team** makes homes safer, warmer, and drier for eligible seniors. For information about Home Repairs, call Linda Strickland at the Harpswell Town Office, 833-5771.
- **Seniors Connecting** makes weekly calls to seniors to chat, check in, and provide safety tips. To sign up for Seniors Connecting, call Linda Strickland at the Harpswell Town Office, 833-5771.
- **The Resources Team** continues to support seniors by phone to connect them with services that help them stay, and be more comfortable, in their homes.
- **The Volunteer Transportation Network** provides free rides to those unable to drive. You must first register with People Plus; call 792-0672.
- HAH has a few books, DVDs, magazines, and books on tape to loan. If you would like to receive any of these, please call Maura Donovan; 833-5335. The items will be delivered on Tuesdays.

Additional resources and information are available on the HAH website at [www.hah.community](http://www.hah.community) and the HAH Facebook page.



## RECYCLING CENTER/TRANSFER STATION PERSONNEL CHANGES

John Warner, who has worked for the Town since 2015, retired at the end of 2020. His replacement is a familiar one to many—Donnette Goodenow, who has been a seasonal employee at the facility. We thank John for his years of diligent service and wish him all the best in his retirement, and we welcome Donnette to the year-round crew.

*John & Donnette—photo taken Summer 2019*

## COMCAST RE-FRANCHISING & SURVEY RESULTS

The Town is in the process of re-negotiating a new 10-year cable television franchise agreement with Comcast, which allows Comcast to continue to use public rights-of-way in Harpswell for delivering its services. Under federal law, the Town can negotiate only with regard to certain cable television matters and not for any matters related to internet or phone services. While the Town's agreement with Comcast is not exclusive, the reality is that the market of subscribers in Harpswell is of a size that competitors are not likely to make the substantial infrastructure investment needed to attract a limited number of subscribers.

As part of the re-franchising process, the Town sought feedback from Comcast customers by including a survey in its 2020 tax bills. Of the 5,236 tax bills mailed, the Town received 586 responses to its cable survey. The Town does not consider this to be a scientific survey, but rather a generalized survey to gather comments and feedback for guiding the Town in its negotiations. In addition to negotiating a franchise fee (maximum allowed is 5% of Comcast's cable television revenues in Harpswell), there are a couple of areas where the Town may focus its efforts: (1) have Comcast consider extending infrastructure to unserved areas; and (2) have Comcast consider funding capital equipment and technology for broadcasting public, educational and governmental programming on local cable television. If the Town requests capital/equipment funding and Comcast agrees to it, this funding is paid for by fees assessed to Harpswell's Comcast customers, which Comcast then passes through to the Town.

Of the 586 survey respondents, 68% subscribed to Comcast:

- 448 (76.5%) for internet services
- 374 (63.8%) for cable TV services
- 199 (34%) for phone

Of those who did not subscribe to Comcast, 90 respondents did not because it was too expensive; 52 watched over-the-air; 35 watched satellite; 31 used phone or computers and 25 did not watch television. Nineteen indicated it was not available on their road. Note: The Town has provided a list of those road locations to Comcast to see if any can be considered for extensions. If Comcast was on their road, most respondents said they would subscribe to internet services.

While Comcast picture quality was rated highly, the value or cost of services was not. Many respondents were concerned about the expense and the lack of options for customers, and some were concerned about poor customer service. The Town has no authority when it comes to cost or packaging of channels, but it can provide clarity to customers about how to pursue unresolved issues with Comcast.

Harpswell Community Television was watched by 65% of the survey respondents, with 214 responding specifically to the various ways they watched HCTV: 143 by cable, 47 by antenna, and 46 by internet. According to survey respondents, local and governmental programming was of more interest than educational programming. Comments ranged from those who thought highly of HCTV to those who were not aware of HCTV and what it offered. Some concerns were expressed about programming, picture quality and not having a local programming schedule.

Thank you to all who participated in the survey (93% were over the age of 46). The Town received useful background information and details which will help the Town in its upcoming negotiations with Comcast. Survey results are available at [www.harpswell.maine.gov](http://www.harpswell.maine.gov) on the Town's website. Negotiations have been extended until September 2021, so if you wish to contact the Town with additional comments or concerns, please send an email to Town Administrator Kristi Eiane at [keiane@town.harpswell.me.us](mailto:keiane@town.harpswell.me.us) or call 207-833-5771.

### IMPORTANT DATES

**January 31, 2021:** Dog Registrations due; online registrations accepted at [www.harpswell.maine.gov](http://www.harpswell.maine.gov) Contact the Town Clerk's Office at 833-5822 for more information.

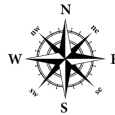
**March 13, 2021:** Referendum Election for Board of Selectman and School Board—Absentee ballots available 30 days prior on or about February 13, 2021—In person voting at Harpswell Community School, 9am to 5pm. Contact the Town Clerk's Office at 833-5822 for more information.

**May 1, 2021:** Mooring Registrations due; online registrations available at [www.harpswell.maine.gov](http://www.harpswell.maine.gov) Contact the Harbor-master at 536-8461 for more information.

## GIVING THANKS

The Town of Harpswell is most fortunate to have so many people who give back to the community and who volunteer for the Town or for other entities that benefit Harpswell and the greater region. The passion and expertise that people bring to their volunteerism is truly remarkable and benefits us all. The charitable contributions that the Town receives are also greatly appreciated. We want to extend special thanks to the following:

- Children of Walter & Joan Phillips for a granite bench at Mitchell Field in honor of their parents
- Family of Chris Duval for a granite bench at Mitchell Field in honor of Chris Duval
- Lisa, Robert and Mary Ann Nahf for a painting of the Old Town House by Dick Herdegen
- Cook's Lobster & Ale House for holding an annual fundraiser to benefit the Town's Home Heating Assistance Program
- Donors to Mid-Coast Hunger Prevention who make the weekly food mobile possible in Harpswell
- Harpswell Aging at Home
- Town of Harpswell Boards & Committees
- All of our First Responders



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