

To the editor:

I normally do not read the “Speak Out” section of the paper because there is no restraint on what anyone may say and the line between truth and fiction is easily blurred. However, the title of one of the articles did catch my attention as I have been following the attempts by the Plymouth Harbormaster to increase his staff in order to revive the Pond Patrol.

“Enforcement needed” stood out and I feel that I need to comment. Luckily, I have never witnessed 32 to 34 foot boats on Great Herring Pond. The largest I have seen are in the 25 to 28 foot range. Granted, these can, and do, create large and potentially damaging wakes. Nor do we have floats that “you could land an airplane on”. The largest float system on Great Herring Pond belongs to the Massachusetts Maritime Academy comprised of three separate systems with the largest reaching some 75 to 100 feet into the pond. This would be the extreme and, since it is State run, is not subject to Town by-laws. We have a few properties with multiple moorings. The best example of this would be the Herring Cove Condominiums where one waterfront area is shared by thirteen homeowners. I would not think that properties such as this would be limited to two moorings.

The main area of concern that I and many of my neighbors have, centers on the access that was created by the State at the southerly end of the pond in the Town of Bourne. This has become a weekend destination for some with no management or supervision by the State. This has led to serious abuse such as public drinking and subsequent boat operation, pulling tubes with a personal watercraft (illegal in Massachusetts), littering the area with everything from underwear to furniture, using the woods within 10 feet of the lake as a toilet, blocking the public roads with vehicles and trailers, and suspected contamination of the pond. The only items listed that concern the Harbormaster’s office are activities on the water within the Town of Plymouth.

The first sentence of the Harbormaster’s mission statement in the 2007 Town Report states: “The mission of the Harbor Master’s Department is to provide a safe and enjoyable experience to the public in and upon Plymouth’s waterways.” If the mission has not changed, there needs to be some focus on the ponds as well as Plymouth Harbor. I understand that the 700 moorings in the harbor pay a fee. Based on the 2007 Town Report, these moorings generated an average \$167.60 each. There was also a fee for the estimated 17,500 boats using the harbor launch ramp of \$1.51 per boat. For these fees, the four full time and fifteen seasonal/intermittent assistants provided 24 hour protection and security, responded to 3,515 calls for service, 3,560 general calls, 1,618 maintenance calls, responded to 129 medical emergencies, towed 112 vessels, recovered 3 missing/stolen boats, 13 arrests, 4 deaths, and 6 boat accidents. They also received 395 pond calls, but the report does not mention how many were responded to.

My reason for mentioning the preceding statistics is to highlight what is being done in the harbor and the associated fees. The Harbormaster proposed that a \$100 fee be put on all docks for only 10 ponds. That leaves the remaining 350 ponds, Town Brook, and Eel River with no fees. Is that fair? We have not yet learned the proposed fee for a mooring.

The folks paying \$167.50 in the harbor get full service while those on the ponds pay pretty much double property tax, excise tax on their boat, and for those with seasonal cottages, personal property tax on furnishings. This easily adds up to an additional \$1,000 to \$2,000 per year, or more. The harbor folks are getting a pretty good deal.

At the last meeting of the Herring Ponds Watershed Association, the consensus of those present was that we are paying enough already to at least have the Pond Patrol visit once or twice per summer. That would go a long way towards “providing a safe and enjoyable experience” on our waterway. The season on the ponds is only about 10 weeks, so 2 visits to each of 10 ponds shouldn’t be that much of a task for a 19 man department. Not one person was in favor of extra taxes to address a situation created by others who pay no fees.

As for the public safety comment directed to Mr. Machado; I feel it was uncalled for and way off base. Not only was it taken out of context, but by Mr. Ruthier’s own statement the new position would “manage this program”. Management of a fee setting, inspection, and collection system has little to do with public safety.

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