

Public Comments by Select Board member Charlie Russo, July 30, 2024:

I'd like to share a Sudbury history lesson. Back in 2015, the relations among Select Board members were so antagonistic and so toxic that almost nothing got accomplished. The members at that time were Pat Brown, Susan Iuliano, Chuck Woodard, Bob Haarde, and Len Simon. Back then, OML violations were often alleged and several times upheld, accusations flew back and forth, and Select Board unfortunately devolved into partisan teams. The Fairbank Center was delayed, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail was delayed, we had trouble attracting experienced candidates to be Town Manager here. It got so bad that in 2015 the Sudbury Clergy Association hired mediators from Harvard University to try to help work things out.

Relationships were so bad that the Harvard University mediators quit.

Elections happened, Select Board members turned over, and we got past that. I ran in part to try to stop the shenanigans we saw then. Susan and Chuck have long since moved out of town. Pat Brown served with distinction on the Commission on Disability after her term on the Select Board ended. Bob Haarde I've seen at Town Meeting, but my understanding is that he is happy to be done with Sudbury politics. That accounts for four of the five members from that time.

And starting about three years ago, when Jen first took over as chair, we started really getting things done, because we gained consensus through compromise. We broke ground on the Fairbanks and BFRT, we approved new Financial Policies, we hired a new Town Manager, we settled a new Sewataro contract, we allocated our ARPA funds. A lot of good work was accomplished to benefit residents.

This history lesson is important, (and I first prepared these remarks in January but have tried to hold off so as not to escalate things) because lately it's feeling like the bad old days again, what with all the FOIAs, unfounded OML complaints, and the Select Board having little to show for the past year except for our bickering over firearms and rubber-stamping minutes.

And with all the memos we've been receiving lately, from that fifth member of the Select Board from back then, who has submitted not 1, not 2, not 3, but approximately 12 angry memos attacking the Select Board over the past 12 months, we can see the link from today back to the bad old days of 2015.

Today I think Select Board members, as elected leaders, we each need to decide: do we want to go back to the bad old way of doing things, where differing views results in personal attacks, when evidence and facts didn't matter, and we saw political posturing instead of work toward solutions - or do want to return to the course of compromise and consensus that we had that worked so well just a few years ago, when so many good things were accomplished.

All that said, I will not tolerate disrespect toward this board, toward members of other committees or staff, or town counsel, which we've had to deal with a lot lately. I hope others join me in looking for compromise and solutions, rather than joining in attacks and reverting back to the bad old days.

Charlie Russo

Sudbury Select Board Member