

Let's Think about Finances

Final part of the series

Evidence Bias

This happens when prejudging a situation limits our ability to look objectively at the whole picture.

There are two ways to approach problems and solutions:

- 1) One is to identify your preferred solution, and then select facts that support your choice. This method can lead to omitting important evidence.
- 2) The other is to identify your options, gather as much information as possible, and use that information to decide how best to act.

Sound decisions cannot be made on selective information.

During this past year, an analysis of revenue and expenditures was presented to the Select Board. (Jean Gran 8/17/20). In the introduction it was stated that “the Town’s tax revenue will be capped...within the next few years.”

The report submitted is based on this assumption. Although it is possible the state could cap our potential to raise taxes, it is not a given. We have been close in the past but as financial situations change so does the possibility of state interference. Since the report is based on this as a fact, it omits important information. Although there is much said about outgoing funds, there is little said about income potential. First, we need to look at how real this possibility is of reaching the state mandated tax limit and then we need to assess what options we have to correct the situation. A proposed solution without this information is unreliable.

A second example happened at a recent Select Board meeting (3/2/21). A town resident expressed concerns about the expense of \$10,000 to support upgrades needed for a temporary move to 18 Jacobs Road, which he spoke strongly against. The amount named was taken from an email exchange between the Select Board and North East Technology. The Select Board Chair was able to show that the email being referenced was actually part of a chain of emails and further clarification showed there was no upgrade required, thus no expense would be incurred for that purpose.

So, what am I asking of you?

- Please be attentive voters.
- If it feels like information is being presented in a way to scare you rather than inform you, be cautious.
- Check comparison information to make sure it really is relatable and that there are footnotes that clarify where/why there are differences to be aware of.
- Beware of options that focus on the small stuff without consideration of the larger issues.
- Think carefully about arguments presented based on a predetermined goal, thus presenting incomplete and potentially misleading information.
- Please speak up and ask questions when something is not clear or fails the tests outlined in these posts.
- Be part of the solution for creating a sound fiscal future for our town.

—Susan Lively

Note: I would like to pass on a thank you to all the individuals who helped me check this document for accuracy, clarity and other editing needs.