

In Northport Special amusement ordinance rejected

By Peter Taber

The vaguely defined matter of "adult entertainment" hanging over the Blue Goose in Northport Monday evening as local citizens ultimately decided 2-1 a proposed Special Amusement Ordinance would-

n't successfully block the arrival in their town of such businesses.

With 164 residents registered at the door for the annual town meeting, the vote to defeat con-

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troversial Article 13 was 75-37. No one questioned the rightness of discouraging the so-called adult entertainment industry from gaining a foothold in Northport, something said to be a real possibility. The majority agreed, however, the ordinance the selectmen had the town attorney draft was seriously flawed to the point of being ineffectual.

Selectman Denise Lindahl struck an unpromising note for the success of the article when she introduced it with the comment, "We're thinking maybe this shouldn't be passed tonight." The board's concern with what was an apparent lifting of boilerplate language adopted by another town, she went on to explain, included that it would only apply to licensed liquor establishments and it failed to designate the town official responsible for inspecting such premises.

In answer to a questioner, Lindahl said the selectmen were responding to "a group of individuals in this town" when they voted to put the article on the warrant. "We heard the possibility of adult entertainment coming into town," she reported.

There was reluctance in the audience to simply abandon the article, one woman saying, "That's what's important to me, that there be restrictions." She warned it would be much easier to restrict before the fact than have to deal with such businesses once they are established. A motion to table action allowing the selectmen to make revisions nonetheless failed. "This is flawed and I would hope it would be defeated," said Larry Doucette. "It's structurally impossible to enforce."

David Staples agreed. "Voting for this means nothing except I can't have a band this Friday night." Staples is proprietor of Willy's World, a miniature golf establishment on Route 1 that started out offering lobster rolls and ice cream, later adding wine, beer and live music entertainment. The fact he has a liquor license, Staples explained, means he would have to go through a lengthy process of up to 60 days before he could be licensed to follow his personal interest in "introducing kids to music." He questioned how

what he provides for entertainment has any connection with the "adult" variety, something that "can still happen tomorrow."

One man cautioned that without an effective ordinance the town is powerless to prevent an acceptable existing business from changing into a less benign one. He related how in another town "a wet T-shirt contest got out of hand—the wet T-shirts disappeared!"

"No matter what business comes to town, you always have the option of voting with your feet," a woman responded.

"If we don't do anything, anything could go," the man answered.

Hideaway Diner owner Ed Moran told of an impromptu recital a young Bangor Symphony Orchestra violinist once put on in his establishment. With the proposed ordinance adopted, he said, "We couldn't do that."

"Any way to take out what we don't want, which is adult entertainment?" a woman asked. She was told it wouldn't be possible that evening to amend the ordinance language so substantively.

"How fast could you move?" Russ Handler asked the selectmen after better than half an hour of discussion. "I think that could answer a lot of questions and the angst that you feel."

Lindahl estimated the selectmen could ideally have a new and effective ordinance drafted and ready for special town meeting consideration "within the next month or two."

"I'm against something that doesn't serve the purpose," Handler said. Moderator Joe Moser said he interpreted Handler's statement as a request to call the question. No one objected, the question was successfully called and the voters voted.

The next item of business, a draft ordinance spelling out the town's administrative organization, functions and responsibilities, fared better, albeit gaining adoption on a secret ballot vote of 69-50. Discussion was necessarily briefer with only Bill Wallace expressing his misgivings publicly.

Charging "this appears to be no less than a sweeping transfer of power from the citizens to the selectmen," Wallace predicted adoption of the 30-page document would "change the future

of the town." He said while he wouldn't impugn the integrity of the current town administration, the ordinance has "a lot of potential for abuse of power" and should receive greater scrutiny from the voters before being acted upon.

Lindahl responded there had, in fact, been an extensive public review process and she was sorry if Wallace was unaware of this. She iterated her introductory remarks that the proposed ordinance "basically reflects the current operation of the town" with two exceptions, that the town clerk should become an appointive rather than elective position and that there be a legal mechanism allowing voters to recall elected town officials.

When Wallace renewed his request to "voice my concerns" about other provisions in the proposed ordinance, zoning board of appeals member John Dykstra declared, "This is a lot of to-do about nothing." Moser said he interpreted Dykstra's statement as a request to cease

discussion. The vote followed.

In other matters to come before the town meeting, Northport citizens:

- learned formal results of Saturday's elections, in which Dorothy "Dee" Reid prevailed with 282 votes over Larry Doucette, 120, and Brent Crawford, 110, to fill the three-year selectman's seat vacancy left by departing Selectman Paul Rooney; Bill Magruder retained the road commissioner's position with 400 votes against challenger Mike Vellaro, who had 111; and Dan Smith was reelected to the SAD 34 school board with 313 votes against challenger Raymond Tucker Jr., with 170;

- voted at the meeting to retain for another year an unchallenged Barbara O'Leary to serve as town clerk, treasurer and tax collector;

- elected an unchallenged (and absent) Chris Damery to serve a year on the planning board;

- engaged in a dialogue with

Magruder over the present and planned future state of town roads, the commissioner noting among other things that a private contractor, not himself, was responsible for tearing up Shore Road and urging townspeople to write the selectmen seeking to enlist support from Sen. Carol Weston to free up more state road funds;

- heard protest voiced by Rooney that the town has 9 percent of the pupils in SAD 34 yet picks up 20 percent of the district's local education cost tab— "...and that's not fair"—and heard him urge reform so towns pay their education bill strictly on a per-pupil basis;

- learned from Lindahl, who delivered the selectmen's report, that the town has been through a year of firsts including conducting a federally mandated property inventory and contracting for a tax anticipation note ("that was paid off in one month's time"); ~~that it might be a good idea to shift the fiscal year to run from July 1; also, what with~~

unfunded mandates from a federal government that is "tightening the purse strings of every budget but their own," the town needs to consider establishing the position of town administrator;

- paid tribute to the work of transfer station attendants Donnie Patten, Tim Patten and Wellington Dunbar, whose group portrait graces the front cover of the latest town report;

- heard from Dave Parkman, the county treasurer, who noted the escalating cost of boarding jail inmates and, in a response to possible secession and the loss of \$865,000 in tax funding, stirred applause when he vowed, "We're not going to let Islesboro go anywhere without a good fight"; and

- notwithstanding Lincolnville's refusal to reciprocate, heeded the perennial threat the right would lapse and voted to enter into an alewife harvesting program "with or without" that particular community's cooperation.