

August 29, 2020

Good morning Colchester BOS members,

I am writing as a citizen and business owner in the Town of Colchester to express concern.

First, it is important for me to preface my concerns by sincerely thanking you for all the positive work you have done and continue to do during the pandemic and during this turbulent time we are living through. We're all affected and so it's important to constantly be mindful of the fact that we do not know how others are affected or what they've experienced.

For me:

- I watched my neighbor leave his house by ambulance in April to never come home again.
- My ice cream concession business of 35 years has been shutdown for all of 2020 (and perhaps more) as a result of COVID and executive orders.
- As a 59 year old public school teacher, I'll welcome students next Tuesday for the first time since March 13th.
- My three adult children have thankfully fared well, two as essential employees (nurse, heavy equipment mechanic) and my oldest a teacher like her dad.
- Being in a bipartisan marriage, imposes a perspective beyond my own, which is valuable.

My concern is regarding the First Selectman's handling of Selectman's Rudko's attempt to respond during citizens' comments. I'm not weighing in on the content of his comment, nor the content of comments of the three citizens that proceeded his comment. I'll note that one preceding youth citizen (*Zander*) didn't give both first and last names with is a typical requirement. I digress.

As noted in your bylaws (#5 below), the First Selectman was *technically* correct in restricting Selectman Rudko in his attempt to speak as a selectman. The First Selectman is the only one allowed to respond, if at all. It should be noted that this restriction is often waived in meetings. Aply, Mr. Rudko invoked his right to speak as a citizen. As reported in the RiverEast News, he only got two minutes. That may have been an honest mistake of time keeping by the First Selectman (*who in this Zoom meeting format has the added power of mute*). Honest mistake or not, Mr. Rudko should be allowed his full three minutes at the next BOS meeting. Just as significant is the absence of an opportunity for the BOS (*per # 1 below*) to vote to extend his time. This too may have been a result of the Zoom format. However, the next BOS meeting should have an agenda item, specific to correcting the handling of Mr. Rudko's comments, such that they could vote to extend his time beyond the three minutes he was due. Disallowing (*muting*) a dissenting view is never correct, regardless of opinions.

(1) If deemed necessary, in order to provide time for maximum citizen participation, the Board of Selectmen may establish a provision at a meeting to limit comments. In such a case, three (3) minutes will be allotted to each speaker at each warned citizen's comments. The Board may decide by a majority vote to extend the 3 minutes of time allotted.

(5) The Board will not respond to comments made during Citizens' Comments, with the exception that the Chairperson only may respond if, in the discretion of the Chairperson, such comments require an immediate response.

Lastly, while all of this might be the result of honest mistakes and due to the circumstance of Zoom meetings, it could just as easily be an example of an abuse of power. I don't know. But one way to lessen this type of incident, regardless of it's a cause is to hold meetings in person moving forward. Just as schools are going in-person, rather than remote, so to might public officials with meetings.

Sincerely,

Dave Dander
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