

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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The New Year

Welcome to 2005, a time anyone can start over with the brand new year. Each one of us can decide by the resolutions we adopt how that year will affect us, and today's Byline looks at the wider community. How does the change of year affect Longmeadow and Massachusetts?

The town is already in the midst of our New Year changes. Beginning nearly two years ago with our vote to study a charter change and followed by the town's acceptance of the new charter, we are well on the way to our new form of town government.

We have elected two new members of the Select Board, formerly known as the Board of Selectmen. And the new position of town manager will soon be filled, officially launching the new administrative structure of the town. Some of the aspects of the new charter await the naming of the manager, who will have the authority to oversee town operations and assume many functions formerly performed by the selectmen.

Continuing a long tradition of citizen involvement with town government, volunteers are working to adapt town bylaws to the new charter, formalize new procedures and otherwise adjust to the requirements of the new charter document. The town's previous charter was signed by Governor John Hancock in 1783, so Longmeadow may well be due for a change.

Longmeadow has worked on its political changes since the May town election, while the state political calendar dictates that changes come the first Wednesday of each odd-numbered year. That made yesterday a bustling day at the State House.

The state-wide officeholders are in the midst of their four year terms, but the old legislative session ended Tuesday at midnight, and every senator and state representative was sworn in yesterday for the new two year session.

The 5,000 bills that were filed last session turned suddenly into scrap paper, though just as many have been filed anew. Both the house and senate will assign new committee chairs, and the legislative process will get underway.

House members and political watchers will pay particular attention to the leadership assignments in the house of representatives. Speaker Sal DiMasi will give a first indication of the direction he plans to lead the house when he makes those appointments. The philosophy of the representative selected to chair the ways and means committee will indicate whether the fiscally conservative record of recent years will continue. And the chairs of other committees may suggest the speaker's intentions concerning casinos, court reform and other ongoing legislative topics.

Legislators will examine those indications later. The function of this week is ceremonial. Wednesday welcomed the new session with the pomp and ceremony that have developed for more than 200 years. The sergeant-at-arms paraded down the aisle with his mace and top hat. The governor administered the oath of office to members. Age-old tradition dictates that the house send delegations to notify both the senate and the governor when we have elected our speaker; the senate likewise notifies us when they elect their president.

The traditions were honored. The session is open for business. The hard work begins next week.