

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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As Time Goes By

Last Sunday's forum, Longmeadow Faces the Future, captured the attention of more than 100 participants who gathered at Bay Path College to brainstorm about their vision of Longmeadow's destiny as a 21st century town. I commend on the selectmen and the volunteers who are spearheading the endeavor. The town has made its way pretty well to the year 2001 without an organized town plan, but the pace of change and our diminishing open space call for planned growth in the years ahead.

As Longmeadow looks to its future, let me take a moment to take a backward glance. Using the history and the memories of my 30 years of residency in town, this week I'd like to reminisce about the community that preceded today's Longmeadow.

When my family settled in Longmeadow the town was recovering from the shock of transferring sixth graders from grammar school into Williams Middle School. My first grade daughter had a long school day because of the ninety minute break at noontime that allowed all children to walk home for lunch. Such walks were, of course, feasible because of the five schools scattered around the town.

The Welcome Wagon hostess invited me to patronize any of several pharmacies, and Longmeadow, Smith, Bliss and Ryan's all served my neighborhood. The Community Market and Armata's joined Popular Market to provide groceries. The pharmacies closed one by one, though the grocery stores, with the Big Y replacing Popular remain today. Branches of Springfield banks were scattered throughout the town and, although banking service is readily available today, the names of all those banks have now disappeared.

Baseball and swimming were the most popular sports activities of the Parks Department, and T-ball was played each spring on the Ely Road ballfield. Swimming was a summertime activity because the town had only its outdoor pools. Household trash was picked up twice a week, and if they missed the pickup, any residents could take their own trash to the town dump on Pondsides Road. The closing of that dump in the '80s was a particularly shocking development. It seemed impossible that "they," the state's environmental officials, could force the town to do without the sanitary landfill.

As a newcomer, I heard stories of other community changes that occurred before my time: the approval of a high school so that our students would not be required to attend school in Springfield; the development of the first shopping center that housed our Steiger's store.

Today's newcomers may not know as they plan for the future that their Gap was our Steiger's, their FirstMass was our SIS. As yesterday's change becomes today's normality, Longmeadow will continue to transform itself to meet the future. I wish the citizen-planners success in their work to direct that transformation to provide maximum benefits to all of her townspeople.