

Many applicants, few openings

by Faye Raymond

Under normal circumstances Ralph Stump might have been a shoo-in for reappointment to the Topsfield Conservation Commission. But now Stump's name is one of four interested in filling two vacancies on the board where he has been a regular member.

At a working session of the Topsfield Board of Selectmen last week, two cons com members and their administrator came to sit in on the discussion surrounding the need to bring their board back up to full complement. Last week the selectmen had named longtime resident and public servant Judd Pratt to fill one vacancy. That left four contenders for the two remaining openings. Those candidates are Stump, Holger Luther of the FinCom, Mark Erickson and Dr. John

Bucchiere.

It was Stump's open opposition expressed about the proposed rail trail through town that brought some discussion among selectmen and board members. Some believe Stump should not be openly voicing his opposition to the rail trail, especially since he is an abutter and had also been serving on the cons com.

The board also referred to a verbal confrontation that had occurred on the rail trail between Stump and Topsfield Rail Trail Chairman Joe Geller. Selectman Boyd Jackson said he had talked to both parties afterward and was satisfied the matter was resolved.

Cons com members and some selectmen said Stump had been an invaluable member of the board.

On the other candidates, Selectman Richard Gandt pointed out that Holger Luther has exten-

sive experience on town boards, and already has a lot of responsibility as a member of the finance committee.

"I would like to spread the load around and bring in new people, especially if there is a sense they are qualified for a job," said Gandt.

Selectman Martha Morrison said it might be wise to appoint some associate or alternate members, almost as a training ground for future vacancies as they occur.

Asked if John McArdle, a former selectman and now cons com member and assessor had any further input, he said, "Thank God the Board of Assessors is an elected board."

Chairman Boyd Jackson said he favored having the working discussion, but preferred to hold a vote on any appointments until an upcoming regular televised meeting of his board.