

Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham Newsletter

Issue #2, February 2004

Another good meeting with attendance of about half the members. A show of hands indicated that about half of the attendees would be visiting the assessors offices regarding a review of their new valuation and tax bill. Several questions came from the audience regarding the new tax bills and assessments prompting the speaker to have Allan Kinney, past chairman of the Board of Assessors, come to the podium to explain how the process works. As you remember, last meeting we discussed that we would start being more proactive. As Frank Dailey said it so well for the Reminder "our goal is to learn first and speak second" It was gratifying that there were several new members that joined our group bringing our membership to over 140 members. The speaker noted that there was a need for members to come forward to form research and study groups for the proposed Safety Complex, the proposed Library Addition and the possible acquisition of the 221 acre parcel of the Rice's Fruit Farm to name but a few. It was mentioned that our press coverage continues to be very good and there was even an article in the December 2003 issue High School's newspaper, The Smoke Signal. There were also two front page articles in The Sunday Republican, The Reminder and The Wilbraham /Hampden Times.

Royce Layman: School Committee Team Leader

As reported at the Jan. 13th School Committee Meeting, preliminary budget projections are done awaiting figures from the Governor. State figures are expected to be released shortly and the Committee is anticipating a late February Meeting to release the preliminary budget. It was reported that based on recent calculations the budget will come in very close to Wilbraham Finance Committee wishes and is expected to be a level funded-same service budget for the coming year. The School Superintendent also commented that they are maintaining tight control on the present budget and expenditures for this year.

All indications from state conversation thus far this year is that Chapter 70 (General Revenue Sharing) and Chapter 71 (School Transportation) will be adequate this year and there is even a slight increase possible in Chapter 71 revenue. As the economy is picking up and increased revenue is coming into Boston, it appears that we may have turned the corner, provided that our elected officials maintain frugal spending habits in the future.

On another note, it was nice to see the new Academic Trust W.H.A.T. providing some addition private revenue to the schools in the form of grants. A check for \$15,000 was presented to the School Committee this month. Patrick Mc Comb: Selectmen Meeting Team Leader.

Over the holidays things have been a little slow at the Selectmen's meetings. Mostly house keeping matter and other mundane items. The budget is starting to be pulled together by the Town Government. This will be the most important phase for our group and our Town. The Selectman have been making many of the right noises, holding the line, let's avoid an over ride, etc. Our team will watch to make sure the actions match the noises. If they don't, the public will be informed promptly.

As always, the team Chuck Marsman, Ted Sowa, Greg Chaconis and Jean Courtney have been great.

John Lovejoy: Finance & Capital Planning Committee Team Leader.

Budget hearings with DPW (highway, engineering, water, sewer, solid waste); Town Library; Fire Department have been completed. Personnel positions not filled because of several years hiring freeze are causing difficulties in each department. Principally because existing staff simply cannot get all the work done (provide the level of services) necessary to run the DPW, the Library and Fire and Ambulance. Ongoing work in the Engineering Department is falling

behind. That work not being completed has a domino effect on their interconnected disciplines as well as providing timely technical data to the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission. The Library staff is stressed out trying to cover all the obligations inherent in running a topnotch Library. Fire, in particular with the Ambulance Service, which is growing steadily, relentlessly, as well as their force, over half of whom live out of town, is finding it more and more difficult to provide the level of service the Town is accustomed to, and in many ways demands. None of the increases suggested for salaries or expense are large, most between two and three per cent. In early February the Fin Com will do a first pass through all Town Budgets and begin to reconcile the budgets' requests with present estimates of revenue.

Capital Budget

Has had one meeting in January. They have a five year plan that pretty well spells out where capital expenditures will be made, though there is some flexibility for 'emergencies'. The boilers in several local schools, 30+ years old, demand attention, as do leaking roofs, and completely out of date intercom / telephone equipment. The Committee has reviewed the financial requirements of a potential Grange Hall acquisition, as well as some serious roof leaking in portions of the Memorial School roof. A call for further data will probably lead to firm decisions in February.

** It seems that a lot of our townspeople are finally getting it when it comes to last years Proposition 2 ½ override. Folks are getting a look at their new tax bills. The newsletter that was in your December tax bill says that the town is raising about 10 ½ % more in property tax revenue. They also say that the average assessment will increase by 12 %. Isn't that nice. If your tax bill this year jumped by \$419, the average, \$260 was due to the override and \$159 was your regular tax increase. That's about \$22 a month plus \$13 a month or \$35 per month more. Forever. Care to do it again?

** A few people, from time to time, have mentioned sidewalks and the value they bring and pleasure they are to use. Well in the spirit of keeping you informed here is the cost of sidewalk. These numbers are a couple of years old and were supplied by the Department of Public Works. Sidewalks 5 feet wide (normal) cost \$33 per lineal foot installed. Main St. from Boston Rd. to Tinkham, \$544,500. If your property has 150 feet of frontage would cost \$4950 per home. So be aware the next time you think, wouldn't sidewalks be nice.

** Allan Kinney met with the Selectmen on January 5th and discussed the use of Enterprise Funds, which is your dump, sewer and water funds, in what seems to be some kind of retainer arrangement in paying collectively 35% of 19 town employees salaries. It's been going on for about 10 years and it seems that there was never a time study done to see if the percentages were correct or just a ballpark figure. Percentage of funds drawn from the enterprise funds ranged from 21% to 106% and amounted to a total of \$237,370 per year. Documentation was submitted to the Selectmen, the Finance Committee and the town Auditors now working .

** Did you see in the Wilbraham/Hampden Times that the expected cost of the proposed Safety Complex is \$10,000,000. That does not include the cost of the land which we, the town, already owns. Our research on bonding showed us that a \$10,000,000 20 year bond (assuming 4 ½ % interest) would cost us, assuming 5000 tax bills, \$201 per year, decreasing down to \$ 141 per year for each household over an 18 year period That's for a home owner whose house value is \$235,000 (the town average). It's proposed location is behind the Town Hall. It would be 37,000 square feet that's about 3/4 of an acre under roof. The town hall is less than 1/3 that size. WOW!

** There is some very happy news about our proposed website. New CC of W members, Stan & Patty Shaw, who's business is EXCELL.NET and is a full service Internet service company, came forward to pledge the design and maintenance of our new website. Their own website is

www.Excell.Net. Look them up. We met with them a week or so ago and design is fully underway. You will be able access a wide range of CC of W information and documents and town information and documents and links. Our site name is www.ConcernedCitizensofWilbraham.org.

Our next meeting is on Tuesday, February 10, 2004 at 7:30 PM
at the Minnechaug Regional High School. Please come.

Important things are going on. You need to come to the meeting to be kept up to date.

Other Important Upcoming Town Meeting

Selectmen Meetings

Mondays, February 2nd, 9th and 23rd 2004, 7:00 PM Town Hall

Finance Committee

Wednesdays, February 4th, 11th, and 18th, 2004, 7:00 PM Town Hall

School Committee

Tuesday, February 10th and 24th, 2004, Thornton Burgess School

www.concernedcitizensofwilbraham.org