

# Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham Newsletter

Issue #4, April 2004

**ATTENTION: THE MEETING IS ON THURSDAY  
APRIL 15 - 7:30 PM - MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Our March 4th meeting was again reasonably well attended. We usually have between 35% to 50% of our active members gathered. The Chair asked for a show of hands on how many were expecting another general override this year this year and no hands went up. When the question was changed to a debt exclusion override, 2 hands went up. I cant help but wonder what the vote will be next year at this time of year. It was announced that our safety committee would be giving us a report during our April meeting. It was also announced that James Dowd (J.D.), an engineer, would be heading up our oversight of the MRHS Capital Improvements Committee. It was noted by the team leaders that the town is really striving to live within our means. I have seen some of the budget numbers and they look OK. Please note that with all the new construction the town actually has about 3.6% more money than it had last year.

## **Royce Layman: School Committee Team Leader**

At the March 8, 2004 Budget Hearing, The Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee approved a proposed budget for 2005 of \$32,707,317. This is an increase of 3.46 % over the 2004 budget. Reflecting this increase: The budget contains no new program that increase costs

The budget returns elementary instrumental music at Soule Road School

No existing programs have been eliminated

Technology and School-to-Career Programs are under study for possible enhancements

On the supply side, general revenue ( Chapter 70 State Funding) is expected to be about the same for 2005. However, transportation reimbursement (Chapter 71 State Funding) is expected to possibly decline again this year. According to the Superintendent this is a fluid budget and could change. Many variables such as final state revenue figures, finalized salary contracts, filling Choice slots, solidifying various service contracts etc. all come together to establish the final budget figure. If all goes relatively close to the estimated budget the community revenue assessment will be reduced slightly for the new year.

## **Patrick Mc Comb: Selectmen Meeting Team Leader.**

Once again this month has been fairly quiet for the Board of Selectmen. Starting with the April 5th meeting things should heat up. The board will deal with actually shaping the budget and town meeting issues.

One issue dealt with was a budget shortfall at solid waste. The advisory committee is projecting a \$70,000.00 deficit. This, due largely from administrative costs. It is unclear whether the practice of paying parts of town employees from the enterprise fund contributed to this problem. A looming issue is the possible purchase of the Rice farm. This would entail about 250 acres of prime south Wilbraham land. The board has been particularly secretive in this matter. They won't discuss price or means of financing the purchase. There has been vague promises that it will cost the tax payers (us) very little money. Statements have also been made that information will be made available well in advance of Town Meeting. Town Meeting is just weeks away in May. This tactic is reminiscent of last years Town Meeting. The people of Wilbraham were forced to

vote with very little prior information being released. I hope the board would agree that an educated voter is a good voter. Even if it disagrees with the board's views.

One proposed Warrant at Town Meeting involves how the finance committee is appointed. Under the proposal the Board of Selectmen would no longer appoint the committee members. The committee members would be appointed by the independently elected Town Moderator. Many communities use this system. At least one board member appears openly hostile to the Warrant and seemed to question the ability of our elected moderator to perform this function.

**John Lovejoy: Finance & Capital Planning Committee Team Leader.**

On Wednesday, March 31 the Finance Committee met with the School Committee and heard their complete budget presentation. Whereas their initial budget for FY '05 on Jan. 29 was up 4.29% above last year's, as the result of paring,, shaving,, tightening up, on 3/31 it was up only 3.46%. School transportation, for which when we regionalized the State promised 100% reimbursement, in FY '05 it now appears that the State will be reimbursing our Towns at 39%. Thus it is as a result of this failed State promise that the Towns must pick up a greater and greater percentage of the transportation cost. And, as we all know, buses cannot teach pupils, only teachers can do that. Wilbraham's share of the school budget is \$15,946,315 plus \$349,553 to pay principle and interest on the Mile Tree and Stony Hill Road School bonds. The Finance Committee has voted to cover this \$16,295,868.

Through some fiscally prudent moves the Finance and Capital Budget Committees have worked out an agreement to shift a few items from the Fire Department operating budget to the Capital Budget (\$25,000 to upgrade the ladder truck, and \$11,000 to upgrade the communication-electronics), and placing the cost of two new Police cruisers in the Police operating budget. As a slow progression toward replacing employees not replaced during the hiring freeze the General Government Budget proposes monies for a part time assistant Reference Librarian; a new firefighter paid from the Ambulance Fund (bringing to three those paid from that Fund); a Senior Engineering Aide; and an Assistant Town Administrator. Within the budgets where these employees will be placed, each of these new hires may be questioned and voted up or down at the Town Meeting. The General Government Budgets for FY '05 are \$9,592,856, not including the Sewer, Water and Solid Waste Enterprises.

The articles of the town warrant will be covered at the May 13th meeting. There are several articles of importance you will need to know about. It is very important that you have a full understanding of these articles so please attend and be sure to bring a friend. The town meeting will be just 4 short days after this meeting.

Our next meeting is on Thursday, May 13, 2004 at 7:30 PM  
at the Middle School - 466 Stony Hill Road. Please come. Bring a Friend!

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, April 5 at 5:30 12 & 22 at 7:00 PM Town Hall

Finance Committee  
None scheduled at time of website update

Town Budget Meeting  
April 14, 2004  
7:00 PM Minnechaug Regional High School

Town Meeting  
May 17, 2004  
7:00 PM Minnechaug Regional High School

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