

Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham Newsletter

Issue #7, December 2004

NOTICE:

Be sure and come to the Special Town Meeting Minnechaug High School, January 11, 2005, Tuesday at 7:00 pm to vote on the proposed Library

C.P.A passes

Well, there has been quite a bit going on since we last sent a newsletter. We are sure all of you know the Community Preservation Act passed. As has been mentioned this will amount to about \$35 per year for the average Wilbraham home valued at \$238,000. You may qualify for an exemption to this tax surcharge depending on your income. The forms are available at the Town Assessors office. A packet of information and an application for exemption are there just for the asking. The form, as I filled it out, was quite simple and easy to complete. The exemption is available to all ages and all households depending on income and age. The income chart is in the little brochure and is easily understood. If you are interested and want the exemption please go and check it out for yourself.

Special Town Meeting for Proposed Library Changes

On January 11th at 7:00 pm we are asking you to attend the Special Town Meeting at Minnechaug Regional High School and give or deny your approval to the start of the process of funding the proposed new library expansion. Many of the comments that we have heard is that the project is just too big. There have also been concerns over tearing down the Brooks room and then rebuilding it among other things. Eventually, if it all goes forward, we will be asked to bond an estimated \$4,500,000. Once construction is completed the cost to the average homeowner will start out at around \$96 per year. That will decrease slowly over the term of the bond which is 20 years. Feelings are running high on both sides of the proposal. The only way you can make your voice heard is by attending the Special Town Meeting and voting yea or nay. If you are not there to vote then you don't get to complain about the outcome of the vote.

Future Property Tax Outlook

We have recently prepared a spreadsheet showing what the possible impact will be on your residential taxes assuming the acceptance of the many large proposed town projects. The Library Project, The Sewer Extension, The Community Preservation Act, The Safety Complex, Repairs to the High School, Modular Additions to Elementary Schools and finally Replacement/Renovation of Minnechaug High School. The total of all projects is in the neighborhood \$40,000,000 in debt exclusions. That's some neighborhood. This is not a scare tactic as Town Administrator Bill Fogarty suggested in the Wilbraham/Hampden Times. This is an attempt on our part to supply as much information as possible to the members of our organization so they could see what the possible future holds. Some of the townspeople can afford it all. Many of us cannot. There will be a revised spreadsheet to include the High School at our next CCW meeting. Come and pick up a copy.

High School Reconstruction/Renovation Planning

The most recent big news has been the plans for the renovation or reconstruction of the Minnechaug Regional High School. The preliminary estimates are between \$57 million and \$63

million. It is expected that the state will cover an estimated 54% of the total cost. This means that the Wilbraham share will be around \$21 million. That amount, on a 30 year bond, will add to your annual property tax bill approximately \$345. Allan Kinney suggested that we approach the School Committee and the Superintendent, Paul Gagliarducci, to discuss scheduling an open house so members of our two communities can take a guided tour of the High School, to make a personal assessment of the building conditions. The meeting attendees agreed unanimously with Allan's suggestion. A few days later Allan informed us he had met with Dr. Gagliarducci and that he agreed with the idea. Dr. Gagliarducci further stated that he feels that the townspeople should be kept closely advised throughout the entire process.

Two Tiered Tax Proposal for Consideration

Finally, one of our CCW members had suggested that the taxation of residential vs commercial real estate might not be equitable in that a greater burden was being unfairly placed on the homeowner. 15 commercial properties were selected to compare tax increases. The preliminary results were startling. We then compiled a 2003 vs 2004 spreadsheet on all 119 town commercial properties. We discovered that in a year when the average residential property taxes went up by 10.5 %, average commercial taxes went down by 5.2 %. We, the CCW, recommended to the Selectman and the Assessors office a consideration to make a small correction in going to a two tier system. We felt that the burden for all in Wilbraham should be the same. This equity would generate an additional \$219, 000 in taxes for our town. Our suggestion was rejected. This means that every house in town pays an extra \$44 in property taxes to offset this loss of \$219,000. All of this documentation is on our web site and on the tables at our regular meetings. Study it for yourself.

Clarification of the Wilbraham's Future Tax Scenario

To those of you who have looked at on line or picked up this spreadsheet at our meetings, it has come to our attention that an explanation is required for two of the line items. First is the line item called Firehouse repairs. Five of your members, two of which are engineers, took a comprehensive tour of the fire stations. After considering the needs, repairs and additions needed to the fire stations an estimate was made regarding the things that needed doing now. In an effort to provide insight in to what the next few years could bring, an estimate of \$1,500,000 was arrived at. The same kind of study was done for the MRHS and an estimate was arrived at using critical items from the \$14,000,000 list provided to the public by Richard Scortino in 2003 & 2004. Our apologies for any questions or confusion this may have caused.

Upcoming Town Meetings

Selectmen Meetings

Mondays, December 6, 13, 26, January 2, 10, 24, 31
at 7:00 PM Town Hall

School Committee Meeting

Tuesday January 11 & 25, 2005
Call 596-3884 for the location of the meeting

Finance Committee Meeting

Wednesday, January 5, 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, 23
7:00 PM At Town Hall

Our next meeting is
January 13, 2005, Thursday at 7:30 PM
at the Wilbraham Middle School
466 Stony Hill Road
Please come and bring a friend.

Living within our means

www.concernedcitizensofwilbraham.org