

Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham

EAGLE EYE NEWS

Living Within Our Means

May/June 2009 ☆ Issue 17

A Public Service Newsletter Dedicated to Keeping the Citizens of Wilbraham Informed About Important Matters.

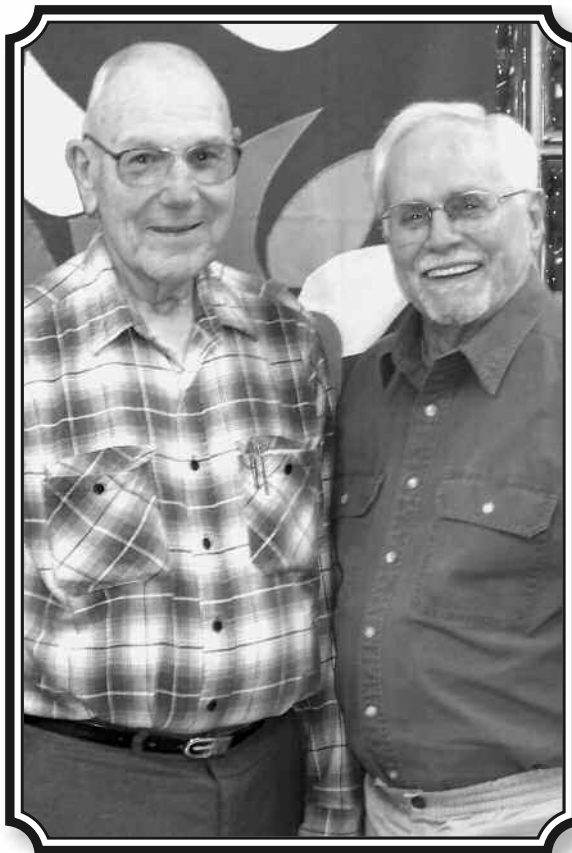
Town Residents to Determine Future of CCW

By Robert L. Page Jr., Chairman CCW and Allan R. Kinney, Vice Chairman of CCW

The Directors of the Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham have been having a great deal of conversation lately about our future as an organization. Here are some of the things we have been talking about.

Unfortunately, due to continuing health issues and other community commitments, we, Bob and Allan, have determined that we will be stepping down from our positions as Chairman and Vice Chairman of CCW. Our original intention was to resign our leadership roles on June 30, 2009. However, due to serious pending issues in Wilbraham, most importantly the question of whether or not to build a new Model High School, we have decided to delay our resignation. We have decided to postpone stepping down until after the new high school question has been decided on. That will probably be sometime later this year.

The time has come to seek and find new leadership for the Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham. At this time none of the existing Directors of our organization are in a position to take over as Chairman or Vice Chairman. We are therefore looking to the citizens of our community for enthusiastic individuals interested in helping our town to live within its means.



Bob Page (right) and Allan Kinney have been Chairman and Vice Chairman, respectively, since they founded CCW in 2003. They plan to step down.

Please know that part of our duties have already being reassigned to lighten the load. Know also that we, the Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham, have a significant research library, money in the bank, a copy machine/printer and ample supplies for the new leadership to hit the ground running, in a manner of speaking. The point is that there will be no need to start from scratch.

The towns-people we hope that come forward will be dedicated to the research necessary to aid Wilbraham becoming a town of well informed voters.

Once Allan and I step down, we will continue to be part of Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham and will continue to serve as Directors, and will do anything we can to aid the new leadership in getting off to a good start. Likewise, the existing Board of Directors will be there to continue their service until the new leadership brings in their own "team". The old Board members' continued service will be an item for discussion in the future.

One last item: *Once Allan and I officially step down, the clock will start running. If no leadership either as individuals or a "team" comes forward, then one year from that date, Allan*

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CCW at Crossroads

From CCW Board of Directors

How would you like to help steer the activities of one of the most successful Community Service groups in Western Massachusetts? Have you, while chatting with friends and/or neighbors thought “Why didn’t we know that? Who approved that change? That doesn’t make sense to me.” **Here is your chance to do something about the future of Wilbraham.**

Started in July of 2003, under the leadership of Robert Page and Allan Kinney, the Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham was formed and has provided a valuable service to the community of Wilbraham. They developed an organization and support groups that are dedicated to *keep Wilbraham taxpayers informed* about important town services, projects, and programs, including the Regional School District. Anything that may have a financial impact on the taxpayer and/or affect the quality of life in our community is a potential topic to be researched.

Why choose to volunteer and help steer the activities of CCW? There are many opportunities in Wilbraham to serve the Community. Some are elected, others appointed, but all reflect a desire to make Wilbraham a better place to live. **CCW is the only group with no ties to the governing structure of the town.** The CCW mission is to research topics, identify

pertinent facts, and share those with the citizens of Wilbraham. To paraphrase a TV slogan, we report so you can decide.

To get a true feel for the past contributions of this organization, just visit our website www.concernedcitizensofwilbraham.org and review some of the **Newsletters** and **Articles and Letters**. You will find informative, well researched articles on a variety of town subjects. Topics such as **General Overrides** and updates from the **Massachusetts School Building Authority** are covered. In addition articles from other publications such as Barbara Anderson’s, the Director of Citizens for Limited Taxation, regarding the **Fiscal Crises Facing Massachusetts Cities and Towns**. This article appeared in the January/February 2008 issue of *Eagle Eye News*. She was right on the money.

Especially important, **since it represents more than 60% of our town budget**, you will find many articles on the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District i.e. student accomplishments, costs, facility concerns, teacher compensation. These have been researched and shared with the community. Throughout the last six years, the CCW communications has always focused on what is accurate and important for taxpayers to understand.

Interested individuals should step forward now to help shape the future of Wilbraham. To express an interest or ask questions regarding this opportunity call Bob Page at 596-8719. It’s amazing what a few good citizens can accomplish.

Reflection on 6 Years of CCW

By Allan R. Kinney, Vice Chairman of CCW

Six years ago on July 9, 2003, 68 people gathered in the Brooks Room of the Wilbraham Library and formed the Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham. The Board of Directors have been providing our members, and anyone else who is interested, with a continuous stream of facts, articles and information to help make our citizens better informed about our town. Below I have listed a few issues we have raised and looked into, and some of the causes we have supported.

1. We had as our guests the Library Trustees on three different occasions to spell out and explain their desire to expand our library. In the end, the voting citizens of Wilbraham determined that their proposal was too big, cost too much, and we were going to need that money elsewhere.
2. We were the whispering force that continued to ask our town leaders to find a way to stop paying for two senior centers at

the same time. The result was on December 27, 2007, the Town cancelled its commitment to the Pine Street facility, saving the Town \$570,000 over the next 11 years.

3. Over this 6-year period we were privileged to have continuously not less than thirty of our members serve in an elected or appointed capacity for the benefit of our community.
4. The publication of our newsletter, the *Eagle Eye News* and the broadcasting of the CCW meetings on our local public access TV channel has been highly regarded for its value in bringing information to the people of Wilbraham.
5. All of the major departments and committees, with one exception, have accepted our invitation to speak and answer questions at our meetings.
6. The Town Report now contains, every other year, all the

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Eagle Eye News is a bi-monthly public service newsletter published by Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham, a taxpayer watchdog group dedicated to keeping Wilbraham citizens informed about important matters. Articles may be submitted for consideration, but are printed at the sole discretion of the editor and may be edited if too long. All submissions must be signed by the author.

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GOOD NEWS - BAD NEWS: POOR TURNOUT AT THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING... AGAIN!

By Matt Villamaino, CCW Board Member and Editor of Eagle Eye News

Currently there are 10,170 registered voters in Wilbraham that could have attended this year's Annual Town Meeting.

The good news is that they all didn't show up! If they did it would've been absolute chaos. The auditorium at Minnechaug only has about 800 seats (not all useable) plus minimal standing room. The bad news, however, is only 294 registered voters turned out for the June 15th meeting. That's pretty disappointing and baffling. *Only 3% of the town turned out to discuss/approve/reject 38 articles.* Some articles had significant financial consequences to taxpayers like Article 11. This article sought approval of the Town's \$34 million budget that amazingly sailed through without a single question or challenge from attendees! Bottom line; this year, a paltry 3% of the town's voters decided how to spend this \$34 million. The other 97% didn't show up. *Talk about voter apathy.* Go figure?

This fall it's expected that the HWRSD will present to the voters a proposal to build a new model high school to replace MRHS. While all the details and final budgets have not been communicated to taxpayers as of this date, the numbers will be significant; \$20, \$25, \$30 million more or less. Final numbers depend on a number of variables that have yet to be determined. Whatever it is, it's expected to affect our taxes for 25 years. Regardless of the final number, its impact on taxes will be significant. Each person will have to evaluate

this proposal and decide what's best, in his/her opinion, for the town and its citizens. Let's hope that more than 294 people show up to voice their opinions and ask questions when it's time to approve or reject this if it comes to an override vote.

Two more things to think about that are looming in the near future. As stated at the June 15th meeting, Wilbraham has a *whopping* projected unfunded \$25 million retiree health insurance liability that must be addressed soon. In addition, the HWRSD has the same problem with their retirees (teachers, janitors, etc.) only their projected, unfunded liability is a *staggering* \$60 million for Wilbraham and Hampden!

How are we going to pay for all this? Spaghetti supper fundraisers? I don't think so.

I suggest taxpayers start asking our selectmen, finance committee and school committee members just how the town is going to get out of this financial mess. Overrides are the only way to address

these monstrous bills. Again, when the time comes to decide what to do, will only 3% of the town's taxpayers decide what's best for the entire town? I hope not. *Get involved. Now. Ask the hard questions. Speak up. And most of all, VOTE! That's one of the most precious rights we have in our free society.*

Hear no evil. Speak no evil. See no evil. Translated... "When it comes to Annual Town Meetings, just ignore them. Someone else will take care of it. It's not your responsibility. Don't get involved."

A sad commentary, but so true. What will it take to change this mindset?

Old cliché...

**“If you don't
vote, you don't
have the right
to complain!”**

Author Unknown



PEOPLE PAY MORE AND MORE, BUT IT'S NEVER ENOUGH

By Taylor Armerding, Associate Editorial Page Editor, Eagle Tribune, North Andover, MA January 18, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

A couple of highlights from my rapidly accumulating outrages file:

Nobody says they're going to raise taxes any more. They're going to "generate new revenues." They're going to "invest in our future." They're going to "roll back the Bush tax cuts for the rich."

Or, in the words of a couple of municipal leaders, Massachusetts cities and towns need, "a more diverse and flexible set of revenue options."

That clarion call for government to take more of your money comes from Bruce Tobey, president of both the Gloucester City Council and the Massachusetts Municipal Association, and Joseph Curtatone, mayor of Somerville and president of the Massachusetts Mayors Association.

To hear them tell it, in a recent essay to area media, cities and towns are starving for cash because they are so grievously limited in the number of ways they can tax their citizens. According to them, municipalities rely almost entirely on property taxes and state aid.

Apparently, it will come as news to them that their constituents already pay a rather "diverse" set of taxes and fees. Has Tobey not heard of water and sewer fees, which in Gloucester are among the highest in New England?

That, of course, is not all. Calling them fees is just a semantic dodge. Most of these are services that used to be covered by property taxes and have been spun off as fees to avoid the limitations of Proposition 2 ½. At the local level there are building permit fees, school bus fees, trash collection fees, dog license fees, athletic participation fees, burial fees and beach fees. I'm sure I'm leaving plenty out. There are auto excise taxes.

Sounds pretty diverse to me. But, Tobey and Curtatone want to add red light photo enforcement, not to cure any big public safety problem, but just to "generate revenue for cities and

towns ..." and let cops supposedly spend time on more serious crime. That's government in action. Find mechanized ways to fine people for marginal infractions.

They also want to add meals taxes and hotel taxes, which Gov. Deval Patrick already pitched as a way to cut property taxes.

These, they said, would amount to "mere pennies to diners," but would take the pressure off the property tax.

I guess I have to give them credit for using "mere pennies" instead of that old standby, "less than a cup of coffee a day."

But, the problem is that pennies add up. You could say the same thing about the state income tax, or the state sales tax, they're just pennies on the dollar. But at the end of the month, it ain't pennies. At the end of the year, it's a mountain of dollars, gone to government.

And I can guarantee that, even if they add hotel and meals taxes and a stack of red-light fines, in a few years or even less, they will be back, complaining that their revenue sources are not nearly diverse enough.

Of course, Tobey and Curtatone also contend that they want "reform" on the table as well — including making "unilateral adjustments to pension system health insurance payouts and education financing ..." Good luck with that. In the face of furious opposition from public employee unions, elected officials fold like ironing boards. The reform never happens, while the taxes and fees always get more diverse, and keep going up.

Tell you what, guys. Let us know when a municipal budget actually decreases — not just "fails to keep pace with fixed costs" — but really decreases. You know, like lots of our own individual family incomes.

Then maybe we'll be willing to talk about more diverse revenue sources for government.

Schedule of Upcoming Meetings

Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham • Thursdays • 7:00 pm

- July - Summer Break, No Meeting
- August - Summer Break, No Meeting

Board of Selectmen • Town Hall • Selectmen's Meeting Room • Mondays • 7:00 pm

- July 13
- August 3, 17, 31

Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee • Tuesdays • 7:00 pm

- July 13 - MRHS
- No other meetings scheduled at this time

Get Involved - Your Opinion Matters

Editor Eagle Eye News Resigns

Matt Villamaino, a member of the CCW Board of Directors and Editor/Designer of the organization's bi-monthly newsletter Eagle Eye News since it was relaunched with the November/December 2007 issue, has resigned both positions. This is the final issue he will produce.

Reflections on CCW from Page 2

salaries of the town employees due to a petitioned article in the Town Warrant by CCW.

7. Three years ago the CCW placed a petitioned article in the Town Warrant asking that the Board of Selectmen to please look into and report back to the town the impact of the unfunded healthcare liability that our town was facing. It has now been identified. The town of Wilbraham has an unfunded \$25 million liability which at sometime in not to distant future, will need to be resolved.

8. For the last 4 consecutive years the CCW has held *Meet the Candidates Night*. This opportunity has provided a forum to hear our public officials who are up for election and ask them questions directly.

9. We have held over sixty public meetings for the benefit of the towns-people and to impart knowledge for the better understanding of how things work in our little town.

10. We have attended scores of Town Committee and Selectmen Meetings to improve on our knowledge and understanding of town government as it relates to *Living Within Our Means*.

11. We have spoken directly with the Wilbraham Board of Selectmen, the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee and the Hampden Board of Selectmen specifically

about *Living Within Our Means*. CCW endorses a position that if the town budget or the Regional School District desired assessment is more than a 2 ½ % increase, we propose that they should be required to place the excess funds separately on a general override vote. We are heading into our 7th year without an override. Maybe it's a coincidence, but we believe that our CCW position has had an influence.

12. We brought clarity to the desire to preserve and to restore *The Grange Hall*. The assessment by engineers and the town building inspector reported to the Capital Planning Committee that the cost to preserve and restore *The Grange Hall* would be prohibitive. That report has prevailed to this day.

Tough and uncertain financial times are ahead. What happens in the next 6 years is entirely up to the new Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham. We hope that CCW will again impact what actually happens in the years to follow.

"Living Within Our Means"

This is a simple, common sense principle that is the foundation of the Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham.

In essence, it means spending only what our community can afford to spend in order to maintain a healthy, and prosperous standard of living that is fair and reasonable for taxpayers in town without overburdening them with higher taxes and fees.



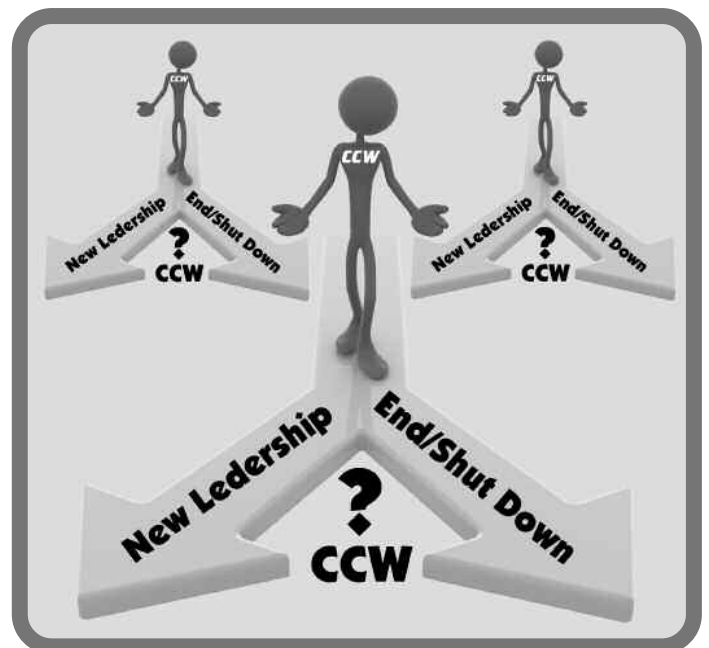
Living Within Our Means does not mean saying no to every proposal or project. Nor does it mean saying yes to everything. It means important expenses that impact taxpayers must be warranted and prioritized, and must be fair and reasonable. Consideration must also be given to our economic outlook and its impact with local, state, and federal issues.

Residents to Decide Future of CCW from Page 1

and I will close down CCW and shut the door.

Finally, Allan and I wish to thank all of our members and supporters for their encouragement, guidance and aid in our quest to bring information to our community. We ask anyone who has an interest in taking on these responsibilities in any capacity, great or small, to speak up. Please call us and let us know what your thoughts and ideas are. We may be reached as follows: Bob Page at 596-8719 and/or Allan Kinney at 596-3732.

Unless new leadership comes forward within one year following the decision on the new high school, the organization Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham, as it is known today, will terminate.





**We Wish You A
Safe, Healthy and
Happy Summer!**

SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER

From Your Friends at
The Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham