

Conroy Supports Override

Wayland Town Crier

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Tom Conroy, Guest Columnist

As all of us in town consider the override proposal that the selectmen are reviewing, I empathize with seniors. I understand that many of you are on fixed incomes, you receive social security checks and sometimes that's it, there's no other income, or there is little other income, but it's not rising with the tide of inflation and property taxes.

I want to help you face this challenge, and given my conversations with the selectmen and the School Committee and the Finance Committee, so do they. And we point to the connection between funding for schools and property values in Wayland - they are correlated, and everyone in the town benefits, including seniors, when we preserve the reputation of this town as one that has great schools.

We point also to the circuit breaker tax relief available to seniors that the state offers, which is matched by town dollars, and which could amount to over \$1,500 in relief from your property taxes, far more than any override would add to your tax bill. We urge you to explore this option. And we point to other ideas of reducing the property tax assessment for seniors which this town is considering. Look into those too and support them if they are worthy.

I also empathize with seniors about the rising cost of public services. They are going up. That's a fact. Health care costs are rising in double digits. Pension and energy and utility costs are similar. But these are not under the town's control. The selectmen and the FinCom and you and I have no control over those rising costs. Sure, we could slash services, take away funds for safety, and from programs for children, and for clean water. But don't we all need to abstain in small ways from a tendency toward self-interest and make some level of allowance for the common good?

An analogous situation for seniors might be a movement to cut Medicare services, because the cost of prescription drugs is rising through no fault of our own. I do not want to see that - I'm sure no one in this town wants to see that. But I do know that when we think about ourselves as part of a larger community, old and young, empty nesters or parents with children, we will all make some contribution to the common good. I'm confident that we will all do the right thing and make the choices that serve the entire community.

I also empathize with seniors about their belief in efficient and effective local government. I believe we should be extremely rigorous about saving taxpayer dollars whenever and wherever we can as we create budgets. You have put pressure on the School Committee and the FinCom to do that, and I applaud that act of citizenship and concern. And the School Committee and FinCom have responded. The volunteers on these committees have worked the long hours. They have scoured the line items. They have cut some services. They have eliminated some jobs. They have benchmarked our costs against neighboring towns. They have explored and have proposed new ways of raising money and saving money. They are well-intentioned people worthy of trust.

I know that many seniors have run organizations before, and put together budgets, and understand how challenging the job can be of balancing priorities amidst limited resources. Seek out those seniors in Wayland who have done so, and ask them. They know that a delicate balancing act is required. They know that when larger forces are at work, tough choices and sacrifice are imposed upon organizations. And I am confident that all seniors are using their common sense and wisdom to avoid making assumptions about waste or excess in this budget and the override proposal. Seniors are smarter than that. They are using their intelligence and experience to analyze each facet of this budget - school supplies, library resources, teacher salaries, fire, police and safety spending - through the lens of

modern educational and public safety requirements. And if anyone can point with facts and not just assumption at waste, then let's root it out. But I am confident that there is not \$3.6 million in waste, or \$2.1 million in fat, or even \$1 million of excess in what the selectmen are considering. And I'll bet that when you look into the details and put yourself in their shoes, you'll reach a similar conclusion.

The fundamental problem we have as a town is that we are not getting sufficient state aid. Misguided choices at the federal and state level are shifting the financial burden onto towns. The rising cost of health care and energy should be dealt with at the state and federal level, not left to towns to use a regressive property tax to address. We need more state aid - assistance for towns in Massachusetts has been cut by over \$700 million in the past four years - to prevent overrides in the future. To get more of that state aid, we need a voice in the State House who can work closely with the Democratic leadership. We don't have that now, and that's one of the reasons I'm running as a Democrat for state representative. With your energy, intelligence and support, we can work together to put an advocate for Wayland in the State House, and create a brighter future with lower relative property taxes for all of us here in our community.

I know that seniors don't have it easy in this town. But I also know that seniors believe that the common good should be served above special interests, and that we are all part of a larger community. This single choice override vote for \$2.1 million, which I support, is such a situation. I am optimistic that most people in the town will make a contribution to the common good by supporting this override.

Thank you.