

## **Development & Sustainability**

**By John Petrin, Town Manager**

I often hear from people that we need to develop our commercial base for the future. The question always begs as to what that really means. We have a commercial base that has developed in our community over the years. We have seen our commercial properties change from a production oriented background to one of where services are provided to local customers. We still maintain some production based business but rely heavily on retail and professional business. The Town certainly has some land that can be developed and would like to see developed. Various groups are working to attract the right blend of business to areas such as Pond Street. But even this development would not significantly alter our financial future as a community.

The bottom line is that we do not have the commercial land nor the transportation routes and access to develop the type of situation that would attract a large employer that could make a significant impact. We do not have route 495 such as Hopkinton or a route 9 like Framingham. We also do not have large tracts of suitable property for that type of development. What we do have is a downtown and Routes 135 and 126 that have brought us a mix of businesses that have blended into our community. We have two supermarkets, which is somewhat unique for a town our size. We also have many restaurants and various businesses that provide services to our residents and surrounding communities. Even if we were able to attract large businesses, we would then need to make sure that they blended well in our community. This is not an easy task and the wrong mix will change the fabric of a community in a negative way.

The bottom line is that Ashland, like most communities, are at a crossroad relative to sustainability. We are on a precipice. For five years we have been cutting back on services, including core essential services. Taxes and fees continue to rise. There are many reasons for this, much too complicated and extensive for the space allotted in this article. I write this not to panic but to state a pure fact that in Massachusetts under Proposition 2 ½ decisions are more and more leading to a review of what core services can we provide and not what we should provide.

Communities have been able to survive with increases in local aid and the reliance on new growth. Growth in a community has been necessary to maintain various services. This growth, including residential growth, is not always welcomed by citizens even though it is the only way to provide new revenue to keep up existing services. We are going to have to make decisions on balancing this growth which is needed to survive financially. Solutions to our fiscal problem are becoming more complicated as the economy has changed.

The best advice that anyone can offer is to support the businesses we currently have. We have a good group of locally owned and chain operated retail and service establishments and restaurants in Town. They support many local groups with their fundraising. They need your support by thinking of them before going out of town. Creating strong local support for our current businesses will help in attracting new businesses.

On a more enjoyable note, I wish to congratulate Robert MacQuarrie on his promotion to Sergeant in the Police Department. Mac started with the Department as a patrol officer in 2004. He has most recently served as a detective. He exudes energy and his level of knowledge and professionalism provides a fantastic base for him as a command officer. We all expect great things in his future.

I write this on the day the special election for senator is being held. We had 25% of voters turnout by 1:00 pm. I would not be surprised to see a 60% turnout in the end. It truly is a shame to see these numbers when we are barely able to turn out 15% for a local election. Our local election is slated for May 18 this year. Nomination papers are now open. Please see Town Clerk's Tara Ward's notes for further information if you are so inclined to run for local elected office.

Please remember the Food Pantry for donations of food and household goods. Donations can be made by dropping off items at public buildings such as the Post Office. Your consideration is appreciated. Please also consider a financial donation to **The Ashland Emergency Fund**, at P.O. Box 112, Ashland, MA 01721. The Fund supports residents in need and the Food Pantry.

To follow what is happening in your community, follow the events and happenings in the MetroWest Daily News and WACA-TV as they provide superb coverage. Our website at [www.AshlandMass.com](http://www.AshlandMass.com) has been recently revamped. There is much information on the site for you to peruse.