

Budget Season

By John Petrin, Town Manager

We have done our first draft of the budget. At this time, we have a deficit of \$655,000 which needs to be addressed for the Annual Town Meeting. The biggest unknown at this time is the amount of state aid we will receive in the upcoming year. In this current year, we will receive a net of \$5.8 Million. This was down from \$6.5 Million the year before. We have initially estimated a cut of \$500,000 for next year to \$5.3 Million. This would be a cut of 18.5% over two years if this cut is realized.

Governor Patrick has submitted a budget where we would realize an increase of \$130,000 rather than the \$500,000 deficit we are projecting. We are now waiting for the Legislature to submit their budget proposal. So far there seems to be a difference of opinion as to how much federal aid the State will receive which affects how much Ashland may receive. The discussion is affecting Ashland by up to \$1 Million. We hope that this discussion is settled shortly so that we can finalize our budget proposal. \$1 Million makes a big difference on a general fund budget of \$46 Million. I need to point out that this deficit also assumes the use of \$500,000 from our reserves being the Stabilization Fund. The Stabilization Fund currently has \$1.2 Million. The concern is the current financial state. It will be difficult to grow these reserves for next year as we are just barely holding our own on revenue received. We need to be concerned that this amount may also be needed for the following fiscal year. If the economy does not react as quickly as we need it to, then we may not be able to cover this amount moving forward.

The Finance Committee has been working on a forecast discussing the Town's financial future. They are finalizing a presentation that they will be making to various groups in Town as the Annual Town Meeting arrives. They are hoping to focus the discussion on the strategic financial view. The Town has had to eliminate and reduce for the last five years. This is in response to expenses increasing faster than resources.

Annual Town Meeting is scheduled for May 5, 2010. Please mark your calendar to be there at 7:00 pm at the Ashland High School Ruthfield Auditorium. Part of the Town Meeting form of government is to get citizens to attend to assist in the decision-making process. As you can see, the discussions on balancing the budget are difficult and may have impact on the services we provide.

My last article seemed to generate some discussion as to development and its place in our financial future. This is an issue that needs to be addressed as Proposition 2 ½ is set up so that growth plays a role in a community's financial future. One item that probably cannot be debated is the need for everyone 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.

Town elections will take place on May 18. There are positions open for Selectmen, School Committee, Moderator, Board of Health, Library Trustees, Assessor, Planning Board, & Housing Authority. If you are interested in running, contact the Town Clerk's office for information on how to serve. Nomination papers are due March 31st.

On a positive note, the Board of Selectmen recently conducted another food drive at Market Basket and Shaw's. It was a chilly day but the support for those in need was not. The drive generated plenty to restock the food pantry as well as almost \$800 in cash and gift cards. There were at least 15-20 volunteers from elected and appointed officials, employees and some teenage volunteers. Both supermarkets have provided a lot of support for these food drives. 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 has been recently revamped. There is much information on the site for you to peruse.