

State and Regional Programs

The Board encouraged Stow's state legislators to adopt proposed municipal health insurance reform and supported regional transportation dispatch services, nursing services, and mutual aid.

Respectfully submitted,

Gary M. Bernklow
Charles Kern, Clerk
Thomas E. Ryan III
James H. Salvie, Chair
Laura Y. Spear

Susan McLaughlin, Administrative Assistant
Phoebe Haberkorn, Office Assistant

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

The Stow town administrator, by Charter, serves as the town's chief administrative officer. In this capacity, the town administrator manages the day-to-day operations of the town, functions as its chief fiscal officer, chief procurement officer, chief personnel officer and its primary contract negotiator. In addition, this position serves the town as chairman of the dispatch communications administrative body, as the labor union grievance hearing appeal officer, the sexual harassment officer and the public records management officer. Throughout the year 2011, the town administrator was actively engaged in managing significant matters in each of these areas.

The most notable aspect of this job is developing the annual operating budget. At the annual town meeting in May 2011, as has been the case for several years, the town administrator recommended a balanced FY-2012 budget within the limits prescribed by proposition two and one-half. In fact, the FY-2011 budget approved at town meeting left the town with unused levy capacity in excess of \$900,000. The FY-2012 municipal budget is a level services budget. The most noteworthy number in the budget relates to debt service.

For FY-2012 the town's annual debt payment increased by 27% to \$1,657,196. This significant increase is due primarily to the fact that the first full principal and interest payment on the initial 9 million dollar bond issuance for the Center school project is due in FY-2012. There has been a second project bond issuance of 7 million dollars and the first principal and interest payment associated with this borrowing will impact the town's annual debt payment in FY-2013. Both of these substantial annual debt payments will be on the books for the next 25 years.

Further, it is important to note that at a special town meeting last November, the voters approved proceeding with the preliminary design phase on three new facility improvement projects: the library, the fire station and the community center. The town's debt burden will necessarily increase, if and as, each of these three projects proceeds to full design and construction.

The FY-2012 budget transfers \$50,000 from Free Cash to the Stabilization Fund in a continuing effort to increase the amount of the town's stored assets. Also, \$200,000 in Free Cash has been

provided in FY-2011 to fund a number of non-bonded capital improvement projects. The same total amount of Free Cash was appropriated for the same two purposes in FY-2011.

The Town's Free Cash account is currently certified at \$1,283,000. The Town's Stabilization Fund account balance, including the \$50,000 that was transferred at last May's annual town meeting is \$706,000. Combined, the current Free Cash and Stabilization Fund balance of \$1,989,000 is at a historic high. We are fortunate to be able to continue to grow our stored asset accounts during these difficult economic times.

Looking forward to next year's FY-2013 budget, it will be necessary to limit our total budget expenditures to approximately 4% above the current fiscal year to not exceed the projected percentage increase in total recurring revenues. Stow is structurally constrained by several revenue impediments that make it increasingly more difficult to balance annual operating budgets.

Most importantly, the town's tax base provides approximately 90 percent of the town's total annual recurring revenues and this problematic trend is continuing. By comparison, Stow's municipal state aid revenue, on average, represents only 3 percent of the Town's total annual revenues. And there is little expectation that this small revenue source will increase appreciably in the future. Similarly, the town's annual local receipts revenues generally represent only 7% of the Town's total revenues. This problem is compounded by the fact that our tax base is almost completely undiversified.

Currently, approximately 92% of the Town's tax base is residential. Ten years ago, residential taxes represented 89% of the total tax base. Further, through various governmental programs, approximately 50 percent of the town's total taxable property is either exempted from taxation or the full tax amount otherwise due is abated significantly.

The painful truth is that Stow's residential taxpayers receive negligible revenue relief from an insignificant commercial, industrial and personal property tax base that continues to shrink. At this time there is little indication there will be any meaningful growth in commercial or industrial taxes in the foreseeable future.

As a special project, throughout the winter months in early 2011, the town administrator worked closely with other town officials, as well as many state agencies and elected officials, in an organized effort to financially assist 57 Harvard Acres residents to disconnect from the Assabet Water Company system. As a major part of this effort the Stow voters approved to accept a 1 million dollar 0% loan from the state Water Pollution Abatement Trust. The town utilized this loan money to provide 2% interest loans to Harvard Acres residents to cover the costs of drilling individual wells. In all, 175 Harvard Acres residents disconnected from Assabet Water Company by March 15, 2011 just before a federal bankruptcy judge shut down the system.

The town administrator, working with town counsel, is directly responsible for managing the town's legal matters. As it relates to litigation in 2011, there are number of on-going administrative legal cases. A few lawsuits relate to various ZBA and planning board decisions

that have been challenged by permit applicants. However, at the moment there are no significant claims against the town that expose us to substantial monetary loss.

As the town's contract negotiator, the town administrator maintains a close working relationship with our fire, police, clerical and fire unions. For the last two decades, the town's four labor unions and town administrator have successfully negotiated every labor agreement without once reaching an impasse or filing for arbitration. This cooperative track record is a tribute to both our union employees and management.

In addition to the specific management responsibilities detailed above, the town administrator is generally engaged in regularly attending to matters critical to the day-to-day operations of the town. In performing these duties, the town administrator is regularly in direct contact with most departmental staff and many Town board and committee members. Finally, due diligence requires that the town administrator frequently works directly with local, state and federal agencies and officials, the public and various private groups and individuals.

Respectfully submitted,

William Wrigley
Town Administrator

Susan McLaughlin, Administrative Assistant
Phoebe Haberkorn, Office Assistant

PLANNING BOARD

A five-member elected board with one appointed associate voting member, the Planning Board has specific statutory requirements. The Board reviews and approves the division of land under the State Subdivision Control Law (MGL c. 41) and the Stow Subdivision Rules and Regulations; serves as a special permit granting authority under the State Zoning Act and the Stow Zoning Bylaw; guides the process of Zoning Bylaw amendments under the State Zoning Act (MGL c. 40A); and adopts a Master Plan that is designed to provide a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the town (MGL c.41).

By statute, the Board is charged with the responsibility of protecting the health, safety and welfare of Stow's residents. Guided by the Massachusetts General Laws, the Stow Zoning Bylaw, the 2010 Stow Master Plan, and citizens' comments and concerns, the Board strives to preserve and enhance the integrity of Stow's character through the use of these regulatory tools, while safeguarding property owners' rights. We recommend and specify changes to development proposals to achieve these goals. Board members and staff strive to work with both applicants and residents to help shape projects so as to positively affect the impact on the community.

The Planning Department also tracks building permits for affordable housing units and submits the necessary documents to the Department of Housing and Community Development for certification.

The Planning Department provides GIS mapping services to various town boards and committees.