

TOWN FATHERS FORUM
113th Session
MONDAY, JANUARY 24, 1977

At 8:00 p.m., Acting Chairman John C. Powers convened the 113th session of the Town Fathers Forum, and he introduced Paul L. Kenny who was appointed as Town Counsel on December 27, 1976, replacing David L. Turner who had resigned.

Acting Chairman Powers announced that tonight's forum would include, in addition to the board and committee reports, a presentation by Town Accountant John H. Wilson concerning the fiscal impact on the tax rate of the incoming departmental proposed budgets, which was a source of great concern to the Selectmen.

Acting Chairman Powers introduced Mr. Wilson, and the Executive Secretary distributed a data sheet which indicated how the projected tax rate of \$58.28 was derived.

Mr. Wilson stated that his presentation tonight concerned the factors leading to a rising tax rate, and he presented a chart illustrating the uncontrollable and controllable tax factors. Mr. Wilson stated that among the uncontrollable factors were State-mandated programs such as Chapter 766, which costs the Town \$700,000 per year and \$4 on the tax rate, inflation, and limited availability of new money to aid the property tax and that among the controllable factors were defined and accurate information, the ability to compare costs both among departments and with other communities, cost analyses of union/management proposals, and the ability to assess financial impacts for the future.

Mr. Wilson presented a chart showing the rise in school budgets, general government costs, unclassified, and debt service, which indicated that if the school costs had increased at the rate of the increase of the Town budgets during the past six to eight years, the school budget would be about \$3,000,000 less than at present, or equivalent to a \$17 decrease in the tax rate and, inversely, if the Town budget had increased at the rate of the school budget, the tax rate would be increased by approximately \$17.

Mr. Wilson summarized by saying that the total property value of the Town is not increasing at the same rate as the budgets; therefore, there is less base to absorb the rising budget costs and the Town is faced with an approximate \$6.28 increase in the tax rate this year.

Executive Secretary Richard Thompson reported that Chairman Toomey was unable to be present this evening, but that it was his (Chairman Toomey's) opinion that tonight's meeting concerning the impact of the 1977-78 budgets was one of the most important meetings of the year. Mr. Thompson further stated that in the analysis and information which Mr. Wilson had put together, the estimated figures were estimates only as were those figures for federal and state aid, but that it was believed that they were accurate figures.

Acting Chairman Powers stated that the Board felt the obligation to bring this matter to the attention of the Town committees, commissions, and departments at this time while the budget process was still ongoing, and he expressed the Board's belief that the current tax bill, which averages \$1600, is extremely high and that any major increases will become confiscatory for many homeowners. Acting Chairman Powers stated that the bottom line is too high and is dangerous to the quality of life in this community, and he illustrated this problem with the following facts:

- The last federal census showed that in 1972, before the recession, 430 Sudbury families were at income levels below the standard for moderate income of \$10,000/year and another 123 families were below the poverty level of \$3800/year.

- The real estate market in Sudbury is down.

- Unemployment figures indicate that at least 340 Sudbury wage earners are unemployed.

- A drop in tax collections has occurred from 96% in 1974 to 92% in 1976, and there has been an increase in partial payments of tax bills from 190 in 1972 to 340 in 1975.

Acting Chairman Powers stated that the Legislature, which has cut local aid funds, which has mandated programs the towns do not want and cannot afford, and to whom the towns must look for major relief, will never respond unless the towns can manage their own affairs with prudence when it is in their power to do so. Chairman Powers stated that the Selectmen were asking every board and department to review their budget demands one more time and asking every municipal employee to look at his wage and benefit demands one more time for the good of the Town.

Selectman Potell stated that everyone has anguished over the rising costs of government, but that it was not known how to stop the spiraling increases. Selectman Potell stated that the projected \$6 increase in the tax rate represents a 10% increase in the tax bill, and he asked where the line should be held. Selectman Potell stated that the Massachusetts Selectmen's Association, at their Annual Meeting, had voted that the towns and cities should have the right to refuse any State-mandated program which is not funded, and he further stated that the Town cannot continue to pay bills when no more money is coming in.

The Executive Secretary stated that costs of government would continue to increase due to the problems of increased salaries because of state collective bargaining laws, the problem of full pension funding, and employee fringe benefits such as Group Medical Insurance. Mr. Thompson further stated that the general Town population has leveled off and there is sharp decrease in school pupil population. Mr. Thompson concluded that everyone should give what was said tonight careful consideration and hopefully tonight's presentation of the financial picture of the Town will assist voters at Town Meeting.

Selectman Powers made the following announcements concerning the Board's activities during December and January:

- The Board had tonight received a very generous anonymous gift in the amount of \$7,503.96 for use in Heritage Park.

- The appointment of Paul L. Kenny on December 27, 1977, as well as the following appointments: Gary E. Ryan and Allen H. Keough as permanent Patrolmen with the Police Department; Ginny Allen and Michelle Singer to the Town Report Preparation Committee; W. Burgess Warren to the Historic Districts Commission (reappointment); Linda McLellan to the Sudbury Auxiliary Police; J. Owen Todd to the Personnel Board to replace George Distler who resigned; W. James Hodder to the Conservation Commission to replace Sandris Stubelis who resigned.

- The resignation of Benjamin R. Walker as Surveyor of Lumber and Measurer of Wood and Willie Hoover from the Sudbury Housing Authority. An election to fill the vacancy created by Mr. Hoover's resignation will be held on January 31 at 9:00 p.m.

- Renewal of annual licenses.

- Approved the Cemetery Rules and Regulations for the Annual Town Meeting article.

- Adopted Landfill Rules and Regulations.

- Authorized work by the Engineering Department on the Peakham/Old Lancaster Roads intersection.

- Approved a new site plan for "99" Restaurant.

- Signed a two-year contract with the Highway Department union.

- Extended the alcoholic beverage serving hours to 1:00 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights for a six-month trial period.

- Approved the Civil Defense Director's Emergency Operations Plan for Sudbury for submission to the State Director of Civil Defense.

- Awarded bids for the Harmony Garden Terrace and Historic Markers in Heritage Park.

- Attended ceremonies transferring 288 acres of Military Reservation Land to the State Department of Environmental Management.

- Scheduled a meeting of the South Middlesex Area Selectmen and area Senators and Representatives for February 16 to discuss collective bargaining.

- Denied, without prejudice, the application of Big W Trans for use of routes through Sudbury to carry passengers to Framingham shopping centers.

Acting Chairman Powers announced that the Rehabilitation Program is now in progress--that \$30,000 is available to Sudbury homeowners to bring homes up to building code standards--and that applications are available at the Town Planner's Office or Selectmen's Office.

REPRESENTATIVE ANN GANNETT - PRECINCTS 2, 3, and 4

Representative Gannett stated that it was very depressing to see the financial status of the Town, and, commenting on the Chapter 766 program in particular, she stated that, in her opinion, the State government is not as State-oriented now as it was. Representative Gannett reported that State officials keep claiming that they are going to increase the cherry sheet figures, but it was uncertain, and that Senator Harrington is of the opinion that binding arbitration is not working.

Representative Gannett complimented the Selectmen for holding the line as best they could, and she stated that she wished she could promise the Town a greater return of money.

On the subject of the Chapter 766 program, Representative Gannett reported that she had suggested to the Commission that a group of legislators personally go to the cities and towns to meet with teachers, parents, and children with special education needs, and she commented that the overall burden is on the towns because they are not being reimbursed for the costs of the program.

Representative Gannett stated that the unfunded pension fund is a \$12,000,000 problem and, in her opinion, the pressure must continue to come from the cities and towns. Representative Gannett also expressed her concern with expenses in the vocational technical schools.

Acting Chairman Powers reported that the Superintendent of the Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical School Districts had stated that between 26-30% of that student body was classified as Chapter 766 students.

REPRESENTATIVE COUNIHAN - PRECINCT 1

Representative Coughlin reported that the State budget will be out on Wednesday, January 26, and that they would then have a better idea of the local aid situation, and she stated that the Governor, the Speaker of the House, and the Senate President had gotten across that government cannot continue to grow and spending must be reduced.

Representative Coughlin stated that she was of the opinion that the towns and cities could look for the State to take over some of the cost of county government, perhaps at least a portion of the court system, and that legislation has been proposed for the State to take over the county correctional system.

Representative Coughlin further reported that additional legislation calls for mandatory, gradual elimination of some State agencies and that she is presently serving on a public service committee discussing pensions, collective bargaining, binding arbitration, and civil service.

Representative Gannett announced that Representative Coughlin is the first woman to be appointed to the Judicial Committee of the Legislature in the Commonwealth.

Representative Coughlin reported that a bill has been filed by Louis Nickinello which divides the MBTA into seven subregions and a core region of fourteen cities, which would provide that the State pick up costs of the core and the subregions pay for their own local service, with the first hearing to be held the beginning of February.

FRANK GRINNELL - BOARD OF ASSESSORS

Mr. Grinnell reported that the Assessors, in looking over what is estimated to be the Town's assessed valuation, were not sure the valuation would increase as much as they had anticipated and that he would not want to bet on a \$58 tax rate--it might be higher. Mr. Grinnell reported that the great majority of building permits are for alterations and have only added \$1,000,000 - \$1,250,000 to the assessed valuation of the Town.

WILLIAM DOWNING - TOWN TREASURER

Mr. Downing reported that interest rates on recently awarded tax notes were very good--the lowest in the Commonwealth--with rates of 2.17-2.24% on \$1,000,000.

ISABELLE STONE - TAX COLLECTOR

Mrs. Stone reported that collections in the Tax Department were down at present and that they were preparing tax bills which will be due on May 1.

FIRE CHIEF

Fire Chief Frost reported that the Town had started off the year with a \$200,000 loss at Stanmar, but that employment was unaffected, that the Fire Department has had an average of three emergency calls per day, but their equipment has not suffered with the extremely cold winter.

Chief Frost stated that he would like to thank the Water District for hiring men to open up the frozen hydrants.

FRANCIS E. WHITE - BUILDING INSPECTOR

Mr. White reported that there had been an average of one new house per week this year, and he advised homeowners to shovel the snow off any low-pitched roof, as several had collapsed in the Town.

PAUL REMINGTON - LONG RANGE CAPITAL EXPENDITURES COMMITTEE

Mr. Remington reported that the Long Range Capital Expenditures Committee has had excellent cooperation from all departments with regard to obtaining information for their report which will be ready by Town Meeting.

KATHLEEN BROWN - CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Mrs. Brown reported that the Conservation Commission has recently been working on Wetland Protection Act hearings and an MAPC project. Mrs. Brown expressed the Commission's appreciation to the Selectmen for their support in opposition to the recent request by the City of Marlborough for a permit modification to their Easterly Treatment Plant.

Mrs. Brown reported that their Land Management Program has been very active, that two Hop Brook work parties have been organized, and that Commission member Judy Cope has been designated to represent them on the Operational Review Committee for the Wayland-Sudbury Septage Disposal Facility.