



Board of Selectmen

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SELECTMEN ACTION LESSENS IMPACT OF COST OF NEW HIGH SCHOOL ON TAXPAYERS

WEST BRIDGEWATER – The recent article published in *The Enterprise* regarding the increase in next year's tax bills notified residents of the anticipated increases in residential and commercial tax bills. In the interest of brevity, the article left out many of the Selectmen's actions preceding the Board's painstaking decision in setting the tax rate. In advance of this year's tax classification hearing, the Selectmen took many steps to ease the burden on residents and businesses alike as they expected increases in tax bills. As a result, the total cost of the Middle/Senior High School project that will be borne by taxpayers actually decreased.

First, through Town Meeting, the Selectmen established a stabilization fund solely dedicated to paying down debt as a result of the new Middle/Senior High School project. At Town Meeting in June of 2013, \$55,000 was reserved for this fund, giving the Town a head start on generating funds for repayment.

The following year, the Board took even more steps to prevent dramatic increases to local tax bills. In June 2014, the Town refrained from purchasing major capital items under guidance from Town Administrator David Gagne. Only three Town Meeting warrant articles requested to borrow funds, all of which were for necessary improvements to water infrastructure. As such, the Water Department, as an enterprise fund, will use revenues from water rates to pay the debt of those projects, not tax revenue. During this same Town Meeting, the Board recommended that the Town adopt a local meals tax, which was voted favorably. The proceeds of the local meals tax will be used specifically to pay down the debt of the new Middle/Senior High School.

Further, Treasurer/Collector John Duggan was able to make an early payment, posted in fiscal year 2015, on the loan for the school, effectively slashing the cost of future obligations for the project by almost \$400,000. This one payment decreased the school project's impact on the average residential tax bill by one third.

Selectmen are also hard at work spurring economic development to increase tax revenues from major businesses. Increased growth coupled with conservative budgeting enables the Town to have a positive balance at the end of the fiscal year, what we call free cash. With more steady free cash throughout the years, eventually the Town can limit annual tax increases, saving residents from higher taxes in future years. It also enables the Town to borrow less while still providing necessary services.

As a result of Mr. Duggan's astuteness, the Selectmen's savings plans and development initiatives, and Mr. Gagne's conservative spending, the average tax bill increased by just \$300-400 rather than the expected \$700-\$800. Effectively, these steps slashed bills, allowing for relatively modest increases while still affording the Town a brand new, state-of-the-art Middle/Senior High School.

The school project was highly supported at a Special Town Meeting, a special election and an annual Town meeting. Voters understood the necessity of a high-quality school system in order to maintain strong tax values. Voters overwhelmingly supported providing for the youth of West Bridgewater by making sure the Town's school system remained competitive in 21st century learning. In response, the Selectmen strategized payment plans and budgeted accordingly, waiting to make major purchases and saving money in anticipation of the debt payment this year. The Town has effectively taken on a new mortgage, and as such we are saving in areas that we can save and generating the funds we need to provide services, such as an excellent school system for our kids, without overburdening other departments. We will continue to lead this Town in our traditional fiscally conservative way, always keeping in mind the burden befallen on the taxpayer in every decision we make. We appreciate your support as we continue working for you.