



LITTLE COMPTON TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

• • NEWSLETTER • •

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May 14, 2014

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Officers

Chairman: Joseph Quinn
Vice Chair: Robert Hayden
Sec/Treas: Roger Lord

The 2014 Financial Town Meeting

From the Chair: Your Taxpayers Association needs your help. First, we need you to be at the Financial Town Meeting (FTM), May 20th at 7:00 pm at the school gym. See Financial Town Meeting article below for all the reasons.

Second, the LCTA needs your E-mail address, which we will keep confidential, for our expanding e-Newsletters. We are increasing the use our e-Newsletter for important, timely, and interesting Little Compton news. We can get e-Newsletters out much faster than our regular Newsletters.

Third, our work for you, our 606 members, is costly. We attend and film all important Town meetings (See videos on Cox), maintain a robust, updated Web site (check it out at www.LCTaxpayer.com), publish Newsletters, (for example: School Bond, FTM, and Election Newsletters), and much more. Printing and postage to deliver to every mailbox in Little Compton is expensive. Please send a donation to help us continue our work for you. New members are also welcome. Please use the membership form on the back of this sheet. - Joseph Quinn, Chairman

The Little Compton Taxpayers Association is the only organization in town that advocates for you, the taxpayer. We try to lower your taxes while the others spend your tax dollars and raise your taxes.

Committee and Town Council, the total tax hike would be between 5.3% and 5.68%.

The FY15 Budget: The Fiscal Year 2015 (FY15) budget as originally requested was \$13,393,503. The Budget Committee has closely examined each request and recommends \$12,715,767 resulting in the tax rate increasing from \$5.38 to \$5.63 or a 5.3% increase in the tax levy. The reductions they recommend are:

★ Willow Avenue Property Purchase, -\$79,990. This is land aside

of the State garage on Willow Avenue where the salt & sand is stored for snow plowing. The plan for the land is a maintenance garage as the existing garage (the old fire house near the school) has become unsafe due to age and natural deterioration. The Town Council withdrew this request.

★ Fire Department, -\$67,600. The Fire Department is training "on call" fire fighters who get wages only for those hours on the job. There are no benefits. It is intended to reduce overtime charges. Unfortunately, the requested overtime budget will increase. The extra funding requested for this will be taken from the ambulance reimbursement fund. The Town Council revised its budget request so that the extra funding requested for this and some other expenses will be taken from the ambulance reimbursement fund rather than impact the tax levy. The Budget Committee has further recommended that the amount for the part-timers be reduced by \$10,700.

★ Police Department, -\$20,000. The Budget Committee has recommended that \$3,000 more be used from the Drug Forfeiture fund than requested and that \$17,000 of Dispatcher-related expenses be shifted to the Ambulance Reimbursement Fund.

★ School Department, -\$252,000. See article below.

★ Peckham Lot Restoration, -\$250,000. Now that the students have moved back into the Wilbur & McMahon School, the temporary classrooms on the Peckham Lot can be removed. The grounds have to be restored. The RCOS (Recreation, Conservation, Open Space committee) has requested a grant from DEM of \$250,000 to rebuild the grounds into a first class soccer field along with a walking path. DEM requires a \$250,000 match from the town. This should be put on hold for a year or more. The Budget Committee recommends that \$62,500 be "borrowed" from the General Fund and be "repaid" over 10 years. This in combination with a \$125,000 2-for-1 matching grant from the Municipal and Talco Trusts and the required \$62,500 of private donations will provide \$250,000 of local

Two Financial Town Meetings This Year: This year, a Special Financial Town Meeting (FTM) will be held just before the regular FTM. The Special FTM is to provide between \$350,000 and \$400,000 to cover a deficit in the school renovation project caused by the lowest bidder being awarded a contract with a price tag of \$11,894,312 while the taxpayers authorized \$11,310,000 at a Special FTM to be held on May 20, 2012. It is important to note that this request will not have any effect on your property taxes. Existing funds will be used. The School Department provided some funding from its surplus it had built up over time. It is important that you attend both meetings.

5.68% Tax Hike: The Little Compton Budget Committee under the leadership of Scott Morrison is to be commended for the hard work it did averting a potential 13% tax hike and dropping it down to 5.68%. The Budget Committee is trying to bring this down even further getting to 5.3% if all of its recommendations are followed. What about the 4% tax cap (RI General Law 44-5-25)? One of the exceptions to exceed the 4% tax cap is an increase in debt service. The school renovation loan is one of those exceptions. In theory, it should have increased the tax levy by 5%. If the school and municipal budgets increased by the maximum allowed of 4%, the total would have come to 9%. However, due to the hard work done by the Budget Committee and cooperation from the School

support for the project in a private-public partnership that will have minimal impact on the taxpayers.

★ Friends of LC Wellness Center, -\$500; East Bay Community Action, -\$750; Prevention Coalition, -\$750: These are private entities that should not receive funds from property taxes.

WARNING

There is a newly formed group in town calling itself "Little Compton Community First" or LCCF. Although the group claims to advocate for the entire community, it seems to be more focused on the school and, to date, has shown little interest in the rest of the town's services. This year, the group tried its best to **INCREASE** the school budget beyond what the School Committee had requested. Does this sound familiar? In 2005 a similar group tried to add \$600K to the school budget at the Financial Town Meeting even though it had no idea where the money would be spent. It resulted in the Financial Town Meeting taking **3** evenings to finally defeat the preposterous request from the floor. The town may be heading in that same direction once again this year.

YOU HAVE A SIGNIFICANT FINANCIAL INTEREST in attending the FTM to defeat **ANY** unnecessary and ill-conceived assault on your wallet. The country is facing hard times with unemployment, inflation, homelessness, Obamacare, etc. This is the last thing anybody wants.

The School Budget: The Wilbur & McMahon School budget is approximately 60% of the Town's total budget. The School Committee recently conducted two budget workshops for the 2014/2015 school budget submission to the Budget Committee. Initially the School Superintendent, Kathy Crowley, recommended a 2.47% increase over the current year. At its March 6th meeting, the School Committee accepted the 2.47% and then increased it to 4% (maximum allowed under RI law) at the urging of the Little Compton Community First (LCCF) organization.

Subsequently, after deliberations with the Budget Committee, the budget request was reduced to the current year budget (i.e., level funding). But does a "level funded" budget make sense when considering the following graph?

The graph shows a precipitous drop in student population while the teacher count essentially stays the same - a slight upward

trend in fact. There is currently a 1st grade class with only 9 students and another one with only 10 students. Who can say they experienced such a low class size when they went to school? Most research defines "small class size" as 22 students or less.

In the early 1980's, before the 1990 addition to the old building was put on, there were over 500 students in the school. Today there are only 255 students after the addition!

The declining student population is expected to continue as predicted by two professional demographers and by actual experience.

Student cost: Portsmouth has an average cost of \$13,237 per student. Little Compton is now close to \$18,286 per student.

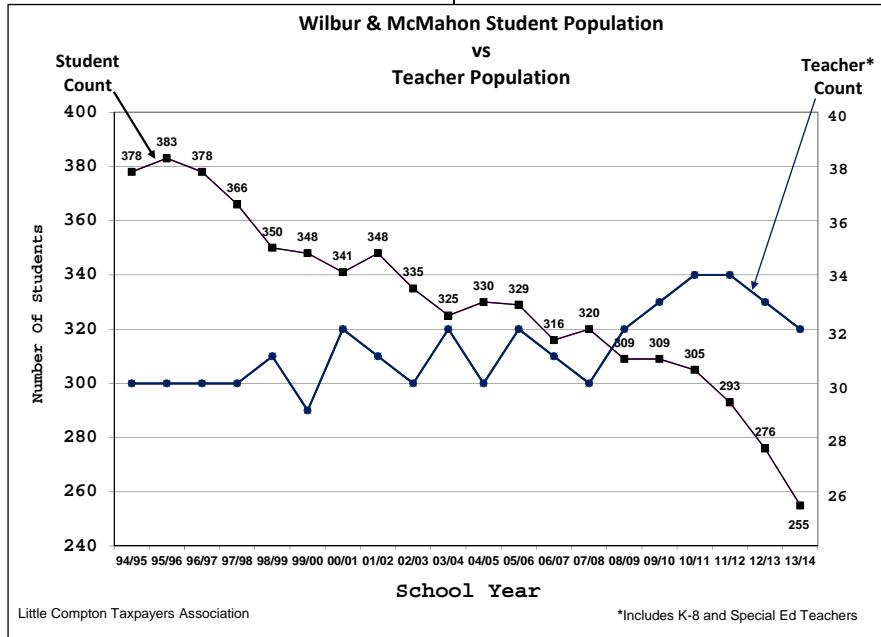
**\$13,237 per student in Portsmouth,
\$18,286 per student in Little Compton!**

In good faith, the taxpayers approved a bond of \$11.3-Million to renovate the school (\$16-Million when including the loan interest for 20-years of payments). Now, for that generosity, the School Committee wanted even more with a full, unnecessary 4% increase. That was truly outrageous! When is it enough? Fortunately, at the urging of the Budget Committee and the Little Compton Taxpayers Association, and with new enrollment data (e.g., kids going to private school), the School Committee reduced its request to level funding, a \$252,000 reduction. And that included eliminating 14 "phantom" students going to Portsmouth High.

But is "level funding" enough? Consider the following.

The table on the next page is a comparison of this year's class sizes of surrounding towns with those of the Wilbur & McMahon School. By its own admission, the School Administration agrees that Little Compton's class sizes are the lowest in the state. The graph on this page goes a long way toward explaining why that is the case.

There is no question that we have some very good teachers in Little Compton. We just have too many of them. There needs to be some staff reductions and the budget needs to go down, not up! Only the School Committee can make that happen due to RI General Law 16-7-23 which states that, "Each community shall contribute local funds to its school committee in an amount not less than



its local contribution for schools in the previous fiscal year." There are exceptions including: "A community which has a decrease in enrollment may compute maintenance of effort on a per-pupil rather than on an aggregate basis when determining its local contribution." \$18,286 per student? Drastically falling

student enrollment? These seem like good reasons to reduce the budget that fit within the law.

| Town | K | 1st | 2nd |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Barrington | 27 | 21 | 22 |
| East Greenwich | 17 | 20 | 21 |
| Jamestown | 15 | 14 | 17 |
| Middletown | 21 | 21 | 19 |
| Tiverton | 21 | 23 | 22 |
| Portsmouth | 20 | 21 | 21 |
| Little Compton | 12 | 9½ | 11½ |

These are average class sizes

The school loan payment is \$850,332 per year (including interest). The State has agreed to pick up 40% of that cost such that the Town's share is \$510,199 every year for the next 20 years. If the school budget increases by 4% at this year's Financial Town Meeting (FTM), then the police, fire, maintenance... budgets will all have to be significantly reduced thereby curtailing various services provided to the townspeople.

CAN PEOPLE ON FIXED INCOME OR LOW INCOME AFFORD THIS?

The "spend more" crowd headed up by the "Little Compton Community First" organization does not seem to care. To get a feel for the thinking of the "spend more" crowd, go to the Taxpayers Association web site (www.LCTaxpayers.com) and scroll down to the article entitled, "You Want Higher Taxes?" There is a "Click here" in the second paragraph that brings up a video clip from the April 1st Budget Committee meeting during which a citizen expresses a desire to raise everybody's taxes and that the "summer people" (those people who own property in Little Compton but live elsewhere) WANT to pay more taxes even though they have no say in the budget. This is what you'll be facing at the FTM. The LCCF has since disconnected themselves from this individual, but they never objected to anything she said at the School Committee or Budget Committee meetings.

We urge you to stop this insanity by attending the Financial Town Meeting on May 20th and prevent any reckless group from placing an additional financial burden on you, the taxpayer. The usual tactic is to load up the gym with supporters to gain a voting advantage over you. You need to show up in larger numbers to see that they do not get what they seek especially since it will needlessly raise your taxes and force all the other departments to lower their budgets affecting service levels. With today's economy and unemployment rate, this is NOT the time to raise everybody's taxes to satisfy a group of people who don't care a stitch about you.

Our kids place very high in state testing and leave Wilbur School with a very good education. We cannot see how throwing any unnecessary funding into the school will change that. The voters at the Financial Town Meeting should be prepared to block any attempts to raise the requested budget, and to support the School Committee should it propose to lower its budget.

The Financial Town Meeting: The annual Financial Town Meeting (FTM) is the final stop of a budget for the next fiscal year. All the proposals and negotiations are done and it is up to the voting taxpayers (i.e., electors) to decide what the final

budget figures will be. Rhode Island law restricts the increase in the levy (i.e., collected taxes from the townspeople) to 4% over the previous fiscal year. There are exceptions one of which applies at this year's FTM - an increase in debt service associated with the \$11.3-Million loan taken out for the renovation of the school. Consequently, the Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation has approved a maximum increase of 5.68% over the current fiscal year.

There are a total of 51 money-related line items (or "strokes") to be voted on during the FTM on May 20, 2014. In most cases, the Budget Committee has recommended the same amount that was requested. In several cases, and with good reason, the Budget Committee has recommended a smaller amount which has been agreed to by the requestor in some cases.



As has been the practice for the last several years, a motion may be made at the beginning of the FTM to vote the entire budget - **AS RECOMMENDED BY THE BUDGET COMMITTEE** - in a single, block vote. It makes sense to do this given that there were no strong arguments for higher budgets from the requestors during the Budget Committee workshops. We believe that the recommended budget is appropriate (actually it should be smaller) and support a single block vote as recommended by the Budget Committee. Why sit in the gym for several hours voting individually on 51 strokes when there is no significant disagreement between the requestors and the Budget Committee? It truly avoids wasting valuable time especially for those individuals who have had to hire babysitters or who work a later shift.

Another reason for the block vote: As we have seen in the past, there are those who, for some obscure reason, want the taxes to go higher and higher each year. They usually are well-to-do and seem not to care about those who are barely making ends meet. Many of them have children in our school and want to recklessly throw money into undefined and unapproved programs for their children. And they want you to pay for it. And after their children have moved on, you never see these people again but you are stuck for the rest of your life with paying the tab that they ran up!

**IT IS IN YOUR BEST FINANCIAL INTEREST
TO ATTEND THE FTM ON May 20, 2014, AT
7:00 PM, IN THE SCHOOL GYM.**



Little Compton Taxpayers Association
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* * TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER * *

LITTLE COMPTON TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP FORM (Vol. XV, No. 1)

NAME _____ DATE _____

OFFICE PHONE _____ FAX _____

EMAIL _____

Local Home Address Check if year-round address

ADDRESS _____

CITY/TOWN _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

HOME PHONE _____

Second Home Address From _____ To _____ (Month/Day)

ADDRESS _____

CITY/TOWN _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

HOME PHONE _____

SUGGESTED CONTRIBUTION: \$15 (Single) \$25 (Family) \$_____ (Other)

Mail this form and your contribution to:

Little Compton Taxpayers Association
PO Box 455
Adamsville, RI 02801