

ADDRESS – LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS – 4/25/07

WELL, WE JUST FINISHED ANOTHER BUDGET YEAR...

AT THE STATE OF THE TOWN MEETING LAST DECEMBER, MY PREDICTION AT THE TIME SUGGESTED THAT THAT THE MILL RATE MIGHT INCREASE THIS YEAR BY 4.4%. LAST YEAR THE MILL RATE INCREASE WAS 2.98%. THIS WAS LIKELY THE LOWEST GROWTH RATE IN 10 YEARS.

I ALSO MENTIONED THAT AS A BOARD, WE WOULD WORK HARD FOR INCREASES BELOW 4.4%. IN ACTUALITY, THE MILL RATE INCREASE THIS YEAR WAS 3.52%. I WOULD POINT OUT THAT THIS IS NEITHER GOOD NOR BAD. IT'S ABOUT RIGHT AND REASONABLE... CONSIDERING THE CIRCUMSTANCES WE FACED THIS YEAR.

STILL, HAVING STATED AN OVERALL GROWTH RATE NUMBER, YOU SHOULD ALSO KNOW THAT WE DO NOT START THE BUDGET PROCESS WITH A STATED INCREASE OBJECTIVE IN MIND. RATHER, WE LOOK AT EACH BUDGET AND SEE WHAT IS ACTUALLY REQUIRED. THEN, WHEN WE ARE DONE, WE LOOK AT THE RESULTING INCREASE. NEXT WE DECIDE HOW THE BUDGET WILL BE FUNDED AND FROM WHAT SOURCES THE BUDGET FUNDING WILL COME FROM.

THE PRINCIPAL METHOD OF FUNDING THE BUDGET COMES, OF COURSE, FROM THE MILL RATE LEVY ON THE GRAND ASSESSMENT LIST. WHILE WE CAN NOT ALWAYS AVOID BUDGET SWINGS, WE DO MAINTAIN RESERVES THAT CAN BE USED TO SMOOTH OUT THE EFFECT OF A TAX RATE INCREASE IN A GIVEN YEAR.

OUR BOARD WILL CONTINUE TO TRY TO MAINTAIN LEVEL AND CONSISTENT GROWTH VERSUS WIDE SWINGS IN THE BUDGET. WHILE THIS MAY NOT ALWAYS BE POSSIBLE, WE PREFER A GRADUAL GROWTH RATE THAT TAXPAYERS CAN TRY TO PLAN ON.

WELL...ENOUGH ABOUT THE BUDGET. THE BUDGET IS SET FOR THE COMING FISCAL YEAR.

AT THE SAME STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS, I ALSO MADE ANOTHER PREDICTION: DARIEN WILL CONTINUE TO BE A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE WITH ACCEPTABLE TAX RATES AS LONG AS WE ALL WORK TOGETHER TO ESTABLISH PRIORITIES FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF OUR CITIZENS.

EXACTLY WHAT DO I MEAN BY THE “COMMON GOOD”. THE COMMON GOOD MEANS THOSE AREAS WE AGREE THAT WE WANT TO FUND COLLECTIVELY FOR THE TOWN. COMMON GOOD, SAID ANOTHER WAY...IS OUR COMMON RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR CITIZENS.

THE OBVIOUS COMMON TOWN RESPONSIBILITIES ARE: PROTECTION OF LIFE, LIMB, PROPERTY...AS WELL AS ROADS, SIDEWALKS, RUNNING GOVERNMENT, ELECTIONS, ENVIRONMENTAL, EMERGENCY SERVICES, BUILDINGS, PARKS, BEACHES, SEWERS, BULK WASTE, SOCIAL SERVICES, TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE & PARKING, LIBRARY, EDUCATION, LAND DEVELOPMENT, SENIOR PROGRAMS, SENIOR HOUSING AND NOW MODERATE INCOME HOUSING.

NOW, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN OF COMMON GOOD----IS PRIVATE GOOD OR PRIVATE RESPONSIBILITY.

THERE IS A FINE LINE BETWEEN WHAT IS A COMMON RESPONSIBILITY AND WHAT IS A PRIVATE RESPONSIBILITY. IT IS AT THIS POINT WHICH THE “PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP” COMES TOGETHER...

WE HAVE MANY LONG STANDING EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRIVATE/PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS. THEY CAN BE FOUND IN OUR COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENTS, OUR PARKS, OUR PLAYGROUNDS, ROADS & DRAINAGE PROJECTS, BALL FIELDS TO NAME A FEW.

LET'S TAKE A MORE RECENT EXAMPLE OF WHERE THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP NEEDS TO COME TOGETHER: THE RECENT FLOODING IN TOWN.

HERE WE CAN FIND AN ILLUSTRATION OF BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND COMMON RESPONSIBILITIES.

INDIVIDUALLY, ONE IS RESPONSIBLE TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILY IN THE EVENT OF A FLOODING EMERGENCY. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE IF ONE LIVES IN A LOW LYING AREA OR NEAR A WATERCOURSE. IT IS A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY. THIS MAY MEAN THAT DURING AN IMPENDING STORM, YOU MAY HAVE TO MOVE YOUR AUTOMOBILES TO HIGHER GROUND, ARRANGE TO EVACUATE TO AN UPLAND NEIGHBOR, MOVE PERSONAL EFFECTS TO A HIGHER LEVEL INSIDE THE HOME AND BE SURE TO HAVE PUMPS ON HAND FOR THE DRYING OUT PROCESS THAT ENIVITABLY COMES BACK.

I HAVE PERSONALLY BEEN INVOLVED IN FLOODING AND KNOW AND PRACTICED THIS DRILL. TO DENY THAT FLOODING CAN NOT HAPPEN TO YOU AND THEN, WHEN IT DOES, DEMAND THE TOWN TO COME TO THE RESCUE, IS UNREALISTIC. IT IS NOT UP TO THE TOWN OF DARIEN TO PROVIDE BASIC "FIRST RESPONSE" FLOOR PLANNING ---THESE ARE INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES. IT IS AN INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY.

SECONDLY, IF YOU OWN PROPERTY WHICH CONTAINS A WATERCOURSE, YOU HAVE A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO BOTH YOUR PROPERTY [FLOOD INSURANCE] AND THE COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY THOSE ABOVE, AROUND AND BELOW YOUR WATERCOURSE. THE RESPONSIBILITY IS TO BE SURE THE WATERCOURSE REMAINS OPEN AND UNBLOCKED. ALSO TO BE SURE THAT LEAVES, CLIPPINGS AND BRUSH DO NOT GET INTO THE WATERCOURSE EITHER.

SO WHERE DOES THE COMMON RESPONSIBILITY ARISE HERE. WHEN WE GET TOO MUCH WATER TRYING TO LEAVE OUR THREE WATERSHEDS, WE GET FLOODING. THE COMMON

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TOWN TO FIND A WAY TO BETTER CONTROL THE WATERCOURSES IN THE EVENT OF FUTURE STORMS.

SO WE BLAME DEVELOPMENT, OR NATURE, OR THIS OR THAT, OR, OR. THE FACT IS THAT TOGETHER, BOTH THE COMMON AND PRIVATE INTERESTS PROBABLY BEEN A BIT REMISS ALL AROUND.

YES, WE CAN RE-STUDY THE PRINCIPAL WATERSHEDS, SOME FOR THE SECOND OR THIRD TIME. YET MUCH OF THE LAND IS PRIVATELY OWNED AND THE ONLY REAL SOLUTION WILL BE TO DEVELOP A PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP. THE SOLUTION OR SOLUTIONS STILL NEED TO BE WORKED OUT. WE MAY EVEN NEED SOME ORDINANCES WHEN EITHER THE PUBLIC OR THE PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP BREAKS DOWN. BOTTOM LINE, THIS IS A JOINT RESPONSIBILITY WHICH CRIES OUT FOR A PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP.

THIS IS NOW AN IMPORTANT ISSUE AND HOPEFULLY CALM HEADS WILL PREVAIL AND WE ALL WILL WORK OUR WAY TOWARDS A SOLUTION IN THE NEXT YEAR OR SO. BOTH SIDES NEED TO BE PREPARED TO SPEND SIGNIFICANT SUMS TOWARDS A COMMON SOLUTION.

SO WHAT ELSE IS AHEAD OF US....ON THE COMMON RESPONSIBILITY FRONT.

FIRST IS THE PROPOSED PURCHASE OF THE LIBRARY PROPERTY. THE BOARD OF FINANCE LOOKS TO THE SELECTMEN FOR LEADERSHIP ON HOW THE LIBRARY PROPERTY WILL BE UTILIZED. OBVIOUSLY THE GOAL IS TO BETTER MEET OUR AFFORDABLE/MODERATE INCOME HOUSING NEEDS.

WE ALSO LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING FRED CONZE AND HIS P&Z TEAM, PETER HILLMAN AND HIS EPC TEAM, AND THE SEVERAL HOUSING RELATED ENTITIES INVOLVED. THE KEY WILL BE DEVELOPING THE "CREATIVE" FINANCING PACKAGE GENERALLY NECESSARY TO PULL THESE HOUSING PROJECTS

TOGETHER. YES, PROJECTS IS PLURAL. THERE WILL LIKELY BE MORE THAN ONE PROJECT.

WE ALSO HAVE WHAT I CALL OUR MAJOR WATER INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS:

GORHAM POND AND ITS HOMEOWNERS ARE LEADING THE WAY WITH A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNESHIP SOLUTION...

WE CAN LIKELY EXPECT THE SAME SOLUTION FOR HOLLY POND...A COMPLETELY NEW DAM IS GOING TO BE REQUIRED AND THE SOLUTION IS ANOTHER PRIVATE/PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP AND THIS ONE WILL INVOLVE BOTH STAMFORD RESIDENTS AS WELL AS BOTH GOVERNMENTS.

OTHER MAJOR PROJECTS ON THE HORIZON:

-CENTER STREET PARKING LOT: MODERNIZATION, EXPANSION AND LIGHTING...TO MEET THE

-WEED BEACH REMOVATIONS...CAN PEAR TREE FAR BEHIND?

-THE SENIOR CENTER: SOMETHING IS GOING TO BE BUILT THERE...

-THE POLICE STATION: REMODELING PLUS AN ADDITION

-POSSIBLE NEW HEALTH DEPARTMENT REQUIREMENTS

-I PREDICT MORE PLANNING EFFORTS WILL BE REQUIRED IN THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AREA...TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE EVENTUAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE THAT COMES FROM WITH SUCH A STUDY...

-SECONDLY, I SEE MORE EFFORT TOWARDS PUTTING IN ENERGY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM & UPGRADES INTO OUR TOWN BUILDINGS... CONSIDERTING HOW DEAR ENERGY COSTS ARE GETTING...MORE EFFICIENT USE OF ENERGY IS REQUIRED...

AT THE END OF THE DAY, THE BOARD OF FINANCE HAS FUNDED VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING THAT THE TOWN HAS NEEDED...AND THIS IS NOT ABOUT TO CHANGE.

STILL, THERE ARE 2 MAJOR CONCERNS WHICH COULD GET IN THE WAY OF OUR EFFORTS:

#1:

UNFORTUNATELY THIS ONE IS ALREADY ON THE HORIZON – WE HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY VOCAL ABOUT THIS FOR THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS... AND THAT IS EMPLOYEE BENEFITS CONTINUE TO RISE AT ALARMING RATES

IN OUR 5 YEAR PLAN – IT SHOWS:

PENSION CONTRIBUTIONS ARE RISING AT 8% PER YEAR  
MEDICAL CONTRIBUTIONS ARE RISING AT 10% PER YEAR  
WORKMEN COMPENSATION RISES AT 10% PER YEAR.

AT 10% COMPOUNDING PER YEAR, THIS MEANS THAT SOME OF THESE COSTS WILL DOUBLE EVERY 6-7 YEARS. THESE INCREASES ARE NOT SUSTAINABLE OVER THE LONG RUN. THESE ALARMING RATES OF INCREASES FOR EMPLOYEE BENEFITS PUT ENORMOUS PRESSURE ON ALL OTHER PARTS OF THE BUDGET....AND WILL PREVENT US FROM DOING MORE FOR OUR TOWN AND SCHOOLS...

WE MAY NOT REALIZE IT, BUT WE ARE A LARGE PEOPLE OPERATION. COMPARE DARIEN TO ONE OF THE STATE ORGANIZATIONS WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE PEOPLE EVERYWHERE – THE CT DMV. WE HAVE ABOUT 100 MORE EMPLOYEES IN DARIEN THAT THEY DO STATEWIDE. WE ARE A BIG OPERATION AND THIS AREA IS A SERIOUS CONCERN.

#2:

VOLUNTEERS...THEY ARE THE FUEL WHICH RUNS THE TOWN... THEY ARE THE GLUE WHICH MAKES THE TOWN FUNCTION AS WELL AS IT DOES. VOLUNTEERS...ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDE THE CRITICAL OVERSIGHT TO MANAGE OUR TOWN GOVERNMENT.

WE NEED TO TREAT VOLUNTEERS WITH GREATER RESPECT... FOR BOTH THEIR TIME AND JUDGMENT...RIGHT OR WRONG...

THE ATTACKS ON OUR VOLUNTEERS ARE BECOMING FAR TOO PERSONAL. THE VOLUNTEERS ARE BEING ATTACKED ON THE BASIS OF THEIR PERSONAL INTEGRITY...THIS IS QUITE DISTRUBING TO SOMEONE WHO IS FREELY GIVING THE TOWN THEIR BEST TIME AND JUDGEMENT...SOME COMMENTS ARE EVEN VICIOUS...

IF WE DON'T STOP THIS, THE ALTERNATIVE WITHOUT OUR EXCEPTIONAL VOLUNTEERS WILL BE A MOVEMENT TO A "FOR HIRE" TOWN GOVERNEMENT TEAM WHICH, OVER TIME WILL TURN IMPERSONAL. ALONG WITH MUCH HIGHER TAXES...CONTROL OF THE TOWN WILL CHANGE, AS WELL AS THE CHARACTER OF THE TOWN WILL CHANGE FOREVER.

LET'S TREASURE OUR VOLUNTEERS...

IN CLOSING, WE HAVE A LOT IN FRONT OF US, BUT WE ARE STILL SMALL TOWN...WE ALL KNOW EACH OTHER...WE ALL NEED TO KEEP TALKING TO EACH OTHER...TO LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER AND RESPECT ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW...WITH SOLID LEADERSHIP...AND WITH ALL OUR OFFICIALS WORKING TOGETHER...AND A SOLID CORE OF VOLUNTEERS..WE WILL CONTINUE THE BE THE GREAT TOWN WE ARE.

THE BOARD OF FINANCE REMAINS DEDICATED TO PROVIDING THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF SERVICES POSSIBLE AT TAX RATE THAT OUR TAXPAYERS CAN AFFORD. OUR JOB TO FIRST ENSURE THAT A PROJECT IS AFFORDABLE BY THE TAXPAYERS AND SECONDLY, THAT WE ARE GETTING THE BEST POSSIBLE DEAL IN TERMS OF COST, EFFICIENCY AND PRODUCTIVITY.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO PERFORM FISCAL DILIGENCE AND FISCAL PRUDENCE ON YOUR BEHALF...