

October 3, 2003

To: David W. Barry, Chairman
Board of Selectman

Dear Chairman Barry,

Let us begin by thanking you for your swift response to our letter dated September 11, 2003. Our suggestions were made after very careful consideration and while we asked for a timely response we did not expect such a rapid response particularly as the six points of our letter were very complex issues.

As to your comments on the authority of the Selectmen's Board, you must know that as the highest elected officials in our community your voice carries great weight with the citizens of Wilbraham who look to you for guidance and leadership. Additionally, as town citizens, we have a personal responsibility to know what we are voting for. However we do feel that our town leaders should strive to make sure that members of our community have all the facts before we are asked to vote.

Our letter was intended to be respectful and to suggest that during these difficult times, perhaps thinking "outside the box" might be productive. A fresh way of looking at things, so to speak.

To that end we suggested zero-based budgeting as a tool that has been gaining much wider respect in the past few years. It is being used in school systems, municipalities and businesses throughout the country. Current references are readily available on Google and at the reference section of the Springfield library. We were disappointed that your reference cited such an old study and the only text by Bernard Herber we found was in the college library in North Adams and that was the Second edition which did not cover your quote. You summarize quoting Bernard Herber's text as the general opinion of experts who studied implementation of this process. That may have been so 20 or 30 years ago when this text was written but it certainly isn't the general opinion today.

To assure ourselves of how firm the ground the Concerned Citizens group was on, we put the question to the Professor of Finance, Ira Smolowitz, PhD, Dean, Bureau of Business Research and Program Development, at American International College. Here is his direct quote regarding zero-based budgeting:

"Living within our means"

“I personally support the discipline imposed by zero-based budgeting (ZBB). As such, every organization should diligently strive to implement this process.

If a department budget is too large then ZBB should be implemented such that 20%, for example, of the budget is subjected to ZBB per year.”

Further, as you may be aware, there is a ZBB bill before the Massachusetts State Senate, Senate Bill 1704 “An Act Relative to Zero-Based Budgeting”. Finally, a book by Etta Kralovec, published this year, entitled ***Schools That Do Too Much***, chapter 5, page 83 -101 on zero-based budgeting is very enlightening (Available at 16 Acres Public Library). While this book deals with schools, the zero-based budgeting principles are the same for all types of budgets. We ask you to give zero-based budgeting a second look

Your example of the work done by the ad hoc committee requested and formed by Selectman Moriarity to take on the PVTA we found unusual. The PVTA wanted to slash bus service in town. That ad hoc committee used zero-based budgeting principles to prove that what our committee believed to be adequate and essential services to the town of Wilbraham was in fact fully financially supported by the proportional funding sources (state, federal, local and fair-box) of the PVTA.

As to our request to suspend current contract negotiations, you stated that you have a legal obligation to bargain in good faith. We respectfully suggest that you have an additional ethical obligation to point out in your bargaining that, in light of present difficult financial circumstances, the money to pay for possible contractual raises may not be there when the time comes. That would leave you two choices: lay offs or another override, an unpleasant choice.

Mr. Chairman, our only purpose in our first letter and this one is to ask you to consider and reconsider how town funds are spent for the next fiscal year so that we might avoid the same kind of “crisis” we faced this year. We have spoken with people who have done zero-based budgets. In the beginning none of them liked it and it was hard work. When it was over they all preferred it as it helped them develop a much more functional and cost effective unit.

Sincerely,
Board of Directors, Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham

William Arcand

Greg Lyman

Allan Kinney

Matthew Metzler

Robert Page

Alphonse Sambor

Raymond Smith

Richard Wheway

“Living within our means”

cc: James J. Thompson, Selectman
Kevin J Moriarty, Selectman
William Fogerty, Administrator
Beverly Litchfield, Town Clerk, Official Copy
Thomas Sullivan, Town Treasurer
JoAnne DeGray, Town Accountant
Richard Howell, Chairman, Board of Assessor
Mary Anne Morris, Chairman, Regional School Committee
Paul Gagliarducci, Superintendent of Schools
Marcia Zimmer, Chairman, Finance Committee

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