

Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham

# EAGLE EYE NEWS

Living Within Our Means

May/June 2008 ☆ Issue 11

A Public Service Newsletter Dedicated to Keeping the Citizens of Wilbraham Informed About Important Matters.

## Why Bother to Vote?

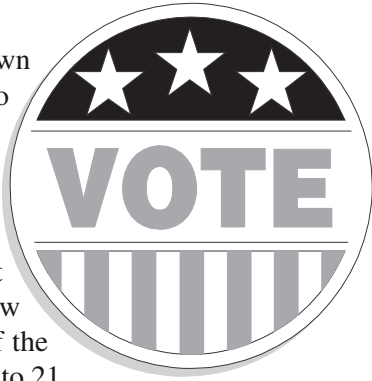
By Robert L. Page Jr., Chairman CCW

At the Wilbraham Town Meeting on May 14, 2007, less than half of the Minnechaug auditorium seats were filled. Only 412 registered voters attended. That's just over four percent of eligible voters. It took a simple majority of those present, 207 people, to decide how all our tax dollars were going to be spent. That's only one and one half percent of the citizens in our community.

When I meet people around town and the conversation turns to how heavy our tax burden is, I always ask that person, "Did you go to the last Town Meeting"? If the answer is no, I tell them straight off, "Don't complain if you won't even show up to vote". I've kept a list of the alibis I've heard. The list is up to 21 and they range from "I have no interest in politics" to "I had to mow the lawn".

If you didn't go to the last Town Meeting then ask yourself this question right now as you read this article. **"WHY NOT?"** There were a lot of issues on the Warrant that needed your input. Granted, sometimes it's not very exciting, sometimes the issues are quite complicated and it's always too long.

Here is a brief look at some of the issues that came up at this past Town Meeting: Should the town plow and maintain private roads? Do we need to bring town salaries more into line with other communities? What are your thoughts on the proposed sewer extension? Should we keep the Grange Hall or get rid of it? Should there be a right to farm by-law in Wilbraham? Should we allow big trucks with big signs to park in residential areas. Should we add another police officer at a cost of \$55,000? As a taxpayer and a



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## Facts VS Fiction

By Zigmund Pabich, CCW Board Member

Recently members of our School Committee in newspaper articles have referred to the CCW as a "small negative group". School Committee Members have referenced the Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham ie CCW as "Confused, Criticizing, and Whining". This is hardly a way for an elected town organization to characterize a concerned Taxpayer group.

The Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham group was organized in July 2003 shortly after Wilbraham voters passed their last general override of \$1,400,000 by 61 votes. We are a registered Political Action Committee with the following Principles.

1. We ask that Town Officials, in pursuit of their duties and responsibilities, commit to "Living Within Our Means".
2. We ask that, while our ideas, votes, and positions may differ from Town Leadership, we be listened to and respected equally as tax contributing members of our community.
3. We pledge to take a more active role in our community.
4. We stand for complete governmental openness and straightforward answers from our town elected or appointed officials.
5. We pledge to serve as a watchdog group on local governmental spending and encourage fiscal responsibility.

**“We ask that Town Officials, in pursuit of their duties and responsibilities, commit to Living Within Our Means.”**  
*The first principle of CCW*

We currently have more than 300 members and distribute a bi-monthly newsletter, called the "Eagle Eye News", to more than 500 households within the community. In addition, we relaunched our website that contains lots of important information for town residents. Check it out at: [www.ConcernedCitizensofWilbraham.com](http://www.ConcernedCitizensofWilbraham.com)

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## SAVE THE DATES!

### ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MAY 12<sup>TH</sup>

Time: 7:00 pm at the Minnechaug  
Regional High School auditorium



### TOWN ELECTIONS MAY 17<sup>TH</sup>

Time: 8:30 am to 6:30 pm  
Pct A: Wilbraham Senior Ctr • Pct C: Memorial School  
Pct B: Stony Hill Rd School • Pct D: Soule Rd School

## A Neighborhood Asks for Our Vote

There are, in Wilbraham, several neighborhoods. One of them is the Boston Road Neighborhood. Yes Wilbraham there is a Boston Road Neighborhood (BRN).

Many of you don't realize that from Nine Mile Pond to the Wilbraham Shops there are approximately 185 homes that have been here since the early 1900's. As we write this article, some 30 additional houses are being proposed on Washington Road by a developer, pending approval of the Wilbraham Planning Board. This equates to 215 families for this area. That's nearly 5% of the homes in town.

There is a Petitioned Article #36 that want to change roughly 26 acres from Adult Care Facility (nice and quiet) to General Business (a car dealership or a "big box" store have been mentioned). Those 26 acres are in the BRN, a residential neighborhood.

On April 9th, 2008, the Planning Board meeting dealt in part with the re-zoning of those 26 acres of land in the BRN off Boston Road. A petition signed by 19 residents of Wilbraham was presented to the Planning Board. Surprisingly none of the property owners on Boston Road had signed this petition. The Boston Road Neighborhood presented its own petition at the Planning Board hearing with 79 signatures representing 40 abutting property owners regarding these 5 parcels. That petition will not be presented at our Town Meeting because of time constraints. These neighbors are counting on our Planning Board and the voters to make the right decision.

This is a residential neighborhood with families and children who should have the right of quiet enjoyment of their homes. No bustling traffic. No bright parking lot lights. No stream of delivery trucks. Let's not let the lure of more new tax dollars cause us to disregard the well-being of our fellow town members and neighbors.

LET'S STAND WITH OUR NEIGHBORS AND DO THE RIGHT THING. **VOTE NO** ON ARTICLE 36 AT THE TOWN MEETING ON MAY 12, 2008 AT MRHS.

## Why Have a Single Polling Place?

Here's a non-binding question that will appear on the ballot at the Town Elections on Saturday May 17, 2008.

**Shall the town vote to establish a single polling place for all precincts in the Town of Wilbraham to be located at the Minnechaug Regional High School?**

There are two important reasons why we are being asked to consider such a change in our voting routine.

First: Having a single place for voting will save the town thousands of dollars in the extra expense of having four places for voting. We are assured that if such a change takes place in the large gymnasium at Minnechaug, there will still be four distinct precincts. They will just be all in one large room. So saving money is one big reason.

Second: Twice every two years we have national and/or state elections. One is a primary election and the other is the general election, and they are held on Tuesday, a school day. For the entire day, with school in session, there are adults coming and going *all day long*. In these days of uncertain security what better time for someone to cause mischief or harm to our school children? Safety is the other huge reason.

We feel for the small amount of inconvenience of simply going to a different polling place it is worth it to know that we will be saving money and not placing our children in harms way unnecessarily.

We say **VOTE YES** on a single polling place.



Eagle Eye News is a bi-monthly public service newsletter published by Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham, a taxpayer watchdog group dedicated to keeping Wilbraham citizens informed about important matters. Articles may be submitted for consideration, but are printed at the sole discretion of the editor and may be edited if too long. All submissions must be signed by the author.

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# ***Our Schools, the Minnechaug Project, and the MSBA***

By Robert L. Page Jr., *Chairman CCW*

Well, there is a lot going on with the MSBA but as near as we can find out, not much of it has to do with Minnechaug.

On April 2, 2008 the MSBA Board of Directors recommended and approved 5 school projects to move forward with a budget and scope agreement, agreed that 11 school projects move forward with concept targeted schematic design and finally 3 school projects received an invitation to feasibility category.

Our reading of newspapers like our W-H Times from all over the State indicate that there is a great deal going on around in Massachusetts with the MSBA.

The last information we have regarding the Minnechaug project as of April 15th is that *"the MSBA is still reviewing our feasibility study"* You will recall that the architectural firm of Dore & Whittier completed that study as instructed by our School Committee in December of 2004. Nothing else to report right now.

A recent study by architect Roy Brown of all buildings owned by the Town of Wilbraham revealed that three of our schools require some serious additional repairs, replacements and maintenance work. Memorial School \$1,907,100, Soule Road School \$972,100 and Wilbraham Middle School \$1,654,500. That is a whopping \$4,533,700. WOW!

Last month we asked the MSBA if it was our Selectmen who should file the Statements of Interest for our town owned Schools to solicit MSBA financial assistance? The answer was: *"The Regional School District would file the Statement of Interest. If approved, the reimbursement would then be sent to the Regional School District and then they would reimburse Wilbraham"*.

We think that Bob Quintin's Capital Planning Committee should perhaps be speaking with Dr. Gagliarducci. The reason? Because if submitted and approved, Wilbraham might be reimbursed approximately half of every dollar it spends to bring our buildings up to par. We could get the job done twice as fast. To illustrate: Three of the five projects just approved by the MSBA for financial aid were for projects of \$500,000 or less. Why shouldn't Wilbraham take advantage of this financial aid availability?

Finally, as all of you may have read in the Republican on April 11, 2008, our School District and the Mass Teachers Union have apparently reached an impasse and have agreed to seek mediation. That does not make it binding. The mediator would be a neutral third party. It seems that our District is attempting to restrain salary growth by an amount that our communities

## **Schedule of Upcoming Meetings**

### **Annual Town Meeting**

- May 12, 2008, 7:00 pm MRHS Auditorium

### **Town Elections**

- May 17, 2008, 8:30 am - 6:30 pm
  - Precinct A: Wilbraham Senior Center
  - Precinct B: Stony Hill Road School
  - Precinct C: Memorial School
  - Precinct D: Soule Road School

### **Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham at Wilbraham Middle School, Thursday**

- May 22, 2008, 7:00 pm
- June 19, 2008, 7:00 pm
- July - No Meeting

### **Board of Selectmen at Town Hall, Selectmen's Meeting Room, Monday**

- May 19, 2008, 7:00 pm
- May 26, 2008, 7:00 pm
- June 2, 2008, 7:00 pm
- June 9, 2008, 7:00 pm
- June 23, 2008, 7:00 pm
- June 30, 2008, 7:00 pm

### **Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee, Tuesday**

- May 13, 2008, Thornton Burgess MS
- May 27, 2008, Mile Tree School
- June 10, 2008, Thornton Burgess MS
- June 24, 2008, MRHS

## **Get Involved - Your Opinion Matters**

can afford without an override. If true, we need to congratulate them for using common sense. We can't be spending more than we have.

We hope that with the current economic uncertainty in our country that a one year contract might also be on the table. It's bad this year. Who knows what next year will be like. Dare we also mention runaway health care costs containment?

# EAGLE EYE NEWS: E-Mail **VS** US Postal



**Your  
Choice.**



As many of you readers know, we are always looking forward to informing the townspeople while watching our pennies. We currently mail to about 10% of the homes in Wilbraham. That's what our budget can afford. In addition to mailing 470 pieces we place a total of another 130 newsletters at the Town Hall, Senior Center and the Village Store.

Some of you know that at the same time we mail out the Eagle Eye News we also have Patty and Stan Shaw, our webmasters at EXCELL.net, post the newsletter on our website at [www.ConcernedCitizensofWilbraham.org](http://www.ConcernedCitizensofWilbraham.org).

Some of our readership have come forward and suggested that if we would just let them know by email that the new Eagle Eye News is on the website then we could strike their name from the newsletter mailing list. That way they can either read it online or print it themselves.

It goes without saying that if you wish to continue receiving the EEN by mail, no problem. We'll keep mailing it to you.

However, if you elect the online choice, we will add a substitute name on your behalf to the mailing list. We think it is a smart and inexpensive way to increase our present circulation.

So what do you say? Leave it like it is or try out the internet? If your answer is yes, "give the internet a try", just give us a call at 596-8719 or email us at:

*[Editor@ConcernedCitizensofWilbraham.org](mailto:Editor@ConcernedCitizensofWilbraham.org)*

## "Meet the Candidates" Night Well Received

CCW was honored to host 7 candidates running for elected office:

*Jim Thompson for Selectman, John Wesolowski for Assessor, Edward Stevenson for Planning Board, D. John McCarthy for Regional School Committee, Wallace Kisiel for Wilbraham Housing Authority, Thomas Pilarcik for Water Commissioner, and Wilfred Renaud for Cemetery Commissioner.*

This was the third year that this event has been held and as usual there was a nice crowd of about fifty voters in attendance. The candidates all took about 5 minutes to tell us about themselves and their qualifications as well as what they brought to the table that made them well suited for the office they were seeking.

After all presentations were made there followed a Q & A: Wallace Kisiel was asked about The Pines and what was to be done with it's auditorium. John McCarthy was asked about the School Committees decision to spend \$15,000 on a public relations effort for the "Minnechaug" project. John Wesolowski explained, once again, why some of our property taxes went up more than 2 ½ percent in a given year. Jim Thompson explained to us how his father had instilled in him the virtue of giving public service to his community. Ted Stevenson answered a few questions about article 36 that is asking us to change the zoning on five parcels in the Boston Road Neighborhood. Tom Pilarcik reminded us all of the great quality of the Wilbraham water. And Wilfred Renaud explained to the audience the 21st century needs of the Cemetery Commission for proper record keeping for our three town cemeteries.

We wish to thank each and every one of the candidates for their participation and giving many of us the chance to put a name and a face together. We especially want to thank you for your service to our community.

## Understanding Teachers' "WORK-TO-RULE" Rule

*By Royce Layman, past CCW Director, and Retired Superintendent of Adams-Cheshire Regional School District*

*With our School System headed for mediation we are sure to hear about possible actions that the Union can take to bring pressure to bare on our School Committee. One of the possible actions is called "Work-to-Rule". We asked Royce Layman to help us all to have a clearer understanding of the concept.*

Work-to-Rule is a condition imposed by the local teachers' union to say that they will do only what is required by contract and no more. This usually takes place after an impasse in negotiations where there is no agreement between the union and local School Committee.

This, of course, is interpreted differently by various groups but, in most cases, involves only extra help and some outside activities. Any paid activities such as sports, music, clubs, field trips, and the like are not included. This is not really a threat to the educational program but does hurt some kids who need these extra events. The biggest problem is the upheaval created between the teachers and the community as the teachers will claim non-support for the children and the profession by the local community.

Work-to-rule can create a lot of animosity but is really the only job action

the union can take unless they are willing to **break the law and strike**.

Keep in mind, though, that some teachers work-to-rule all the time.

As you may know, the teachers' union has held to the notion that all teachers should be paid equally based on degrees and experience. This obviously gives little incentive to go beyond the call of duty. However, I will say that there are many who are truly dedicated and give their all to each student every day. Work-to-rule only frustrates these dedicated people.

Local School Committee members should not be intimidated by work-to-rule threats when negotiating teacher contracts especially when money is in short supply within the community. Collective bargaining law calls for both sides to negotiate in good faith and if money is not available this has to be recognized by both sides.

We thought that the citizens of Wilbraham would be impressed to see the results that Chairman Bob Quinton and his Capital Planning Committee have done in maintaining and renovating our schools. They are dedicated and conscientious people who deserve our thanks and

respect. Our children and grandchildren say thank you as well. Whether we renovate or rebuild Minnechaug Regional High School, we must see to it that those who are responsible for its upkeep are as diligent in their responsibilities as Bob and his committee!

## Wilbraham's 13 Year Capital School Improvement Program

### Memorial School

Renovations-Memorial	FY97	Bond	42,000	
Roof-Memorial	FY97	Bond	125,000	
New water service and main gate valve	FY00	Appropriation	9,000	
Renovations-Memorial	FY01	Bond	530,000	
Electrical upgrades - Memorial School	FY02	Bond	47,000	
Intercoms-Soule Rd and Memorial Sch	FY02	Bond	32,000	
Renovations-Memorial	FY04	Bond	135,000	
Intercom-Memorial	FY05	Bond	39,000	
Refurbish bathrooms-Memorial	FY05	Bond	28,000	
HVAC Repair/Upgrade-Memorial School	FY06	Bond	175,000	
Repair 2nd Boiler - Memorial	FY06	Bond	15,000	
Roof Replacement-Memorial	FY07	Bond	250,000	
Asbestos study -Memorial	FY07	Bond	6,000	
Building Study for Memorial	FY07	Bond	15,000	
Asbestos Removal Memorial	FY08	Bond	315,000	
				<b>\$ 1,763,000</b>

### Soule Road School

Roof - Soule Road	FY97	Bond	357,000	
Alarms-Soule	FY01	Bond	14,000	
Intercoms-Soule Rd and Memorial Sch	FY02	Bond	32,000	
Boiler-Soule Road	FY05	Bond	175,000	
Phone System-Middle/Soule	FY05	Bond	13,500	
				<b>\$ 591,500</b>

### Wilbraham Middle School

Floors - Middle School	FY96	Bond	66,000	
Air Quality -Middle	FY00	Bond	302,205	
Auditorium Seats-Middle	FY01	Bond	71,000	
Sewer Project - Middle School	FY03	Bond	40,000	
Elevator-Middle School	FY05	Appropriation	30,000	
				<b>\$ 509,205</b>

Fire Alrms/Emerg Lghts-Local schools	FY04/05/06	Bond	93,000	
Security Systems-Local Schools	FY05	Bond	12,500	
				<b>\$ 105,500</b>

**SUB - TOTAL \$ 2,969,205**

<b>Mile Tree/Stony Hill School Renovations</b>		Bond	9,950,000	
				<b>\$ 9,950,000</b>

**GRAND TOTAL \$ 12,919,205**

## Why Vote from Page 1

citizen we have a responsibility for how we spend that \$33 million dollars for town services plus the school system. That's an awful lot of spending to leave to such a tiny little group. How would you vote on these issues?

For every registered voter who attended, 46 did not. I can't speak for you but if there is going to be \$33,846,602 spent I definitely want to be involved in the decision making process. There are

going to be in our future some expensive issues that we taxpayers are going to have to decide. Wouldn't you like to represent yourself on these issues?



*At a Town Meeting, the town takes care of any housecleaning it has left before the end of the current fiscal year, and prepares itself to enter the new fiscal year by approving a budget. It may also vote on non-budgetary issues on the warrant, including the town's general and zoning bylaws. An article may be placed on the warrant by the Selectmen, sometimes at the request of town departments, or by a petition signed by at least ten registered voters of the town.*

One major issue that we are going to have decide is the repair, renovation or replacement Minnechaug Regional High School. The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) just had a Facilities and Maintenance Assessment team spend the better part of two days at our high school and will be submitting a report to their Directors regarding that assessment. The MSBA will let us know if they will help us financially. Wilbraham and Hampden will then have 120 days to decide to accept or reject their offer of help. Your voice will be needed at the Town Meeting and in the voting booth. That tax increase could range from \$170 to \$600 per year for 25 years. Would that be worth showing up at the Town Meeting?

Getting informed is easy. You don't have to attend 100 Committee meetings to learn what is going on so you can vote intelligently. There are several local websites to look at. For instance: Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District, <http://www.hwrsd.org/>, Town of Wilbraham, <http://wilbraham-ma.gov/>, Town of Hampden, <http://www.hampden.org/>, MSBA, <http://www.massschoolbuildings.org/>, Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham, <http://www.concernedcitizensofwilbraham.org/default.htm>, State School Finance, <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/compliance.html>, to name but a few. The newspapers always carry in depth articles on the issues. Go to the Town Hall and ask a few questions. I can guarantee that you will find friendly and helpful town employees who will be pleased to help you. Call any and all public officials and be informed.

Finally, here is a big reason to get involved and vote. Every

month the town charges the average residence \$363 for town services and bills quarterly. These are your taxes. Voting and going to town meetings is the only way you can learn if you are getting your monies worth. Come on in...the water's fine.

## Facts or Fiction from Page 1

Plus, CCW members serve on many Town Committees, while others regularly attend Committee or Selectmen Meetings. As a group we pride ourselves on staying very informed about local and state actions that could impact our community. We report on these topics in a factual and comprehensive way. As a group, we are one of the largest, if not the largest, community action groups in the State. We're positive while offering alternatives or questioning published expert reports. We are confident and not "confused" about various issues since we research them fully. It is not "critical" to offer alternatives. We believe it is how the best decisions are ultimately reached. If being persistent can be construed as "whining" then we are guilty as charged and plan to continue.

Over the last five years we have presented alternative positions in a number of areas. For example:

- 1. CCW has always supported major renovations to the Minnechaug High School.*
- 2. We supplied much information to the community regarding the proposed new library and had library trustees as our meeting guests on three occasions.*
- 3. We were the "whispering" force behind a review of the Pine School lease resulting in a \$500,000 savings for the Town.*
- 4. We encouraged fair budgeting between the School Department and General Government. Both groups have submitted Budgets with less than a 2-1/2% increase for FY2009.*
- 5. We continue to support the study of unfunded liabilities for the town ie. Healthcare Costs.*

We can only hope that all groups in our community adopt our Principles and help even more to improve the productivity of our tax dollars. Hopefully these school committee members will stop this childish name-calling and recognize that CCW has an important role in our community that many citizens support and respect.



*Please feel free to invite your neighbors and friends to our next CCW Meeting. It's open to everyone and we encourage comments and feedback of all kind!*