



# Portsmouth Concerned Citizens

## NEWSLETTER

“Information is the currency of Democracy”

- Thomas Jefferson

Editor: Joe Robicheau

October 26, 2006  
Volume II, Edition 4

### *From the President* -- Larry Fitzmorris

**The Elections** – Portsmouth has an active political scene. Our turnout in elections is usually very good, when compared to other communities in Rhode Island. But we must do better. If you do not vote you are not participating in the process that writes your tax bill, determines which major municipal projects we embark upon and the overall flavor of government in our town. This issue is dedicated to the upcoming election and an analysis of the candidates and issues in this campaign.

**Two Years of Publication** – This edition marks the fourth newsletter this year and the completion of the second full year of publication for the PCC newsletter. We have published four editions in each year, meeting our goals for the period. Our efforts are intended to provide our members and the citizens of Portsmouth with an alternate source of information about events in our town government.

### *In This Issue:*

**PCC Recommendations for Local Office** – Who we recommend to our members.

**Recommendations of the People’s Alliance For Better Government for the Assembly** – The PCC lists the recommendations of the People’s Alliance for Assembly candidates from the Portsmouth area.

**The Process we Used** – Joe Lorenz discusses the approach that the PCC used to evaluate local candidates. Following this process the members voted on each candidate, ratifying the recommendations of the Committee.

**The Decisions Ahead** – This is a review of the major decisions which our elected leaders will face in the next two years. Those issues include the decision on sewers, dealing with future retirement benefits and the school building fire code upgrades required by new state laws.

**Ballot Measures** – The PCC reports upon the RISC recommendations on changes to the State Constitution to provide for a Casino, Extending voting rights to felons on parole and increasing the state’s Rainy Day Fund.

**Caruolo Act?** – A discussion of the approach the School Committee is taking to reverse the budget reductions adopted at the Town Meeting.

## PCC Recommendations for Local Office

*(Larry Fitzmorris)* The PCC recommends to our members the following candidates for local office. We do not instruct our members in how to vote, but have prepared the following list in response to a number of requests from our members and those in the community. The following candidates will, in our view, support the basic principals of tax limitation and open government that we support.

### **Council, Seven Positions on the Ballot:**

**Albert D. Buddemeyer (R)**

**Dennis M. Canario (D)**

**Ronald R. Dupont (R)**

**Karen J. Gleason (I)**

**Herbert E. Little (R)**

**Joseph A. Matais (R)**

**Peter J. McIntyre (R)**

### **School Committee, Four Positions on the Ballot:**

**Michael Buddemeyer (R)**

**Melinda A. Dupont (R)**

**Jamie B. Heaney (R)**

**Thomas D. Smith (R)**

### **Town Clerk:**

**Kathy Viera Beaudoin (R)**

## Recommendations of the People’s Alliance

**State Senate, District 11: Chris Ottiano (R)**

**House District 69: Spencer Maguire (R)**

**House District 70: Joseph Amaral (R)**

**House District 71: John Loughlin (R)**

**House District 72: John Robitaille (R)**

# The Endorsement Process

**(Joe Lorenz)** --Recognizing a community need for information on local candidates for Portsmouth elected office, Portsmouth Concerned Citizens sponsored a Candidate Endorsement effort to satisfy that need.

A Candidate Endorsement Committee was formed to develop a questionnaire to solicit written candidate responses, as well as, sponsor a "Candidate's Night" to encourage candidates to express their positions and answer questions important to voters. The Committee was formed from both members at large and the PCC's Executive Committee.

The candidate's responses were evaluated against the Portsmouth Concerned Citizens' values, which include; open government, accountability of elected officials, effective budgeting, superior schools, elector access to process and lower taxes.

Results of the Endorsement Committee's written and oral evaluations were presented to the general PCC membership for input and approval.

The approved recommendations of this comprehensive effort present candidates that we believe will restore responsive and effective government to Portsmouth. The endorsed candidates are listed in this Newsletter, which has been mailed to all PCC members, as well as other interested voters.

As for the Assembly, we have included the recommendations of the People's Alliance for Better Government, of which PCC and the Rhode Island Shoreline Coalition are members. These recommendations include all of the Assembly seats for Portsmouth. A number of our members participated in the PABG's deliberations and the last newsletter contained a description of the group.

We urge you to take this Newsletter to the voting booth on November 7.

## Decisions Ahead

**(Larry Fitzmorris)** Our Town's course is greatly affected by the individuals we select to manage Portsmouth. The citizens we elect on November 7 will face a number of challenges. The manner in which they deal with them will affect tax policy dramatically.

While the future is not wholly visible, at least four serious challenges face our town. These are the sewer system decision, the upgrading of our schools to meet the new fire codes, the shortfall in funds necessary to pay for retirement benefits for town employees and an unstable school department budget.

**The Sewer System** – The cost estimates for the sewer system have grown as the proposal becomes better defined for a system intended to remedy a number of problems in northern Portsmouth. At present there are a number of unidentified leakages into the Sakonnet River from the Island Park and

Common Fence Point areas. The proposed system's coverage presently includes Portsmouth Park, Island Park and Common Fence Point. The cost for this area, including a treatment plant, is \$40 million. The cost for the homes serviced is approximately \$4,000 each and that will reduce the cost of the system by roughly \$4 million. That would leave approximately \$36 million to be funded by the Town.

**Upgrading the School Buildings** – This is another area in which there are no clear cost estimates. While estimates of \$15 million have been used, they are not based upon engineering estimates. In any case, the costs are going to be significant. The Council will face the decision not only of cost, but the requirement to designate which body, Council or School Committee, will manage the project. Recent experience with the School Committee's management of the gym project would seem to eliminate that body, but the decision is ahead of us.

**Shortfall in Retirement Benefits Funding** – Last fiscal year's decisions by the Council to increase funding to cover School Department deficits in the 2004 – 2005 year depleted the town's reserve fund by approximately \$1 million. The standard requires about \$4 million in the fund and we presently have \$2 million. In the near future the town will have to start reporting the shortfalls under the new accounting standards for municipalities, but they are now not reported. The Town's Financial Director has recommended changes to financial policy that would make future expenditures less likely, but the funds must be replaced if the town is to meet its future obligations to its employees.

**The School Department Budget** – Even the most casual observer of the School Department's budget work will recognize that the School Committee has not succeeded in bringing the process under control. Three of the four positions on the Committee are up for a vote in this election, and so there will not be a wholesale change, regardless of the outcome. A return to fiscal sanity will likely depend upon the Council's actions, but they will likely face rapidly increasing demands for new funding from the School Department.

Regardless of any funding surprises in the next two years, the requirements that must be faced will be serious challenges. The state is not going to help us through our budget problems. The Council, at the least, must face these challenges with thought and courage. Otherwise we face a future of budget and tax increases that will make recent experience seem tame.

## Ballot Measures

**(Larry Fitzmorris)** The Rhode Island Shoreline Coalition recommends votes for the Constitutional Amendment Proposals on the ballot as follows:

Proposition 1 – The Casino – NO

Proposition 2 – Restoration of Voting Rights for Felons – NO

Proposition 3 – Increase in the 'Rainy Day Fund' – YES

# Caruolo Act?

*(Larry Fitzmorris)* The School Committee's majority is conducting a charade to disguise their effort to reverse the budget decision Portsmouth voters made at the Town Meeting. Mrs. Wedge, Mr. Carpenter, Mrs. Cortvriend, Mr. Croston and Mrs. Levesque are supporting this initiative. Should they proceed as planned, they will be suing the people who elected them and, if successful, an immediate tax increase will result.

Following the Town Meeting, the Committee refused to adjust their budget to meet the reduction. They merely changed the budget bottom line, while leaving all budgeted expenditures in place. The result is a \$1.1 million deficit.

The School Committee then commissioned a \$40,000 audit by accounting firm, B&E. The audit, now complete, is intended to inform the Committee of its budgetary condition before entering court to sue the people. It was presented in secret and a written report was promised at a later date.

The Committee has repeatedly denied that they have voted to conduct a Caruolo Act appeal, yet they continue to vote to take each step in turn. The School Committee, in effect, is conducting a stealth Caruolo Act appeal. During this process they have completely rejected the concept of keeping the voters informed of their actions and decisions, and have begun to conduct much of the important business of the committee in Executive Session. They have done this to avoid public criticism of their actions.

The first step in the Caruolo appeal, requesting relief on state budget mandates from the State Commissioner of Education, has been completed. This request has been denied, as expected.

The second step is requesting additional funds from the Council, which the School Committee voted to do by letter at its October 10<sup>th</sup> meeting. Since the Council has no legal authority to override the budget voted at the Town Meeting the request should be denied, in which case the Caruolo process will proceed.

The next major step is to enter Providence Superior Court and request that the court direct the town to provide additional funding for the current fiscal year. An independent audit of the school department's books is required during this process, with the audit firm appointed by the President of the Council.

In this course of action there is a great deal at stake. Should the Superior Court support the Committee's position; the effective use of the Charter provision providing for review of the town budget by the people will be ended. The elimination of a basic right of the electors is a cost the School Committee is eager to accept, but this will render the oversight of our town budget by the people always subject to court appeals by the Committee. In the end, in order to support their huge spending plan, the School Committee's majority is willing to eliminate our rights as citizens.

*The PCC has a number of fundamental goals: limited and moderate property tax increases, open and responsive town government in which the people have access to the decision makers and the decision process, superior public schools and efficient town government.*

*If you are in agreement...*

## **BECOME A PCC MEMBER TODAY!**

### **PORTSMOUTH CONCERNED CITIZENS MEMBERSHIP FORM**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/TOWN \_\_\_\_\_

HOME PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ OFFICE PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

ANNUAL DUES:        \$20 (Single)        \$25 (Family)        \$100+ (Founder's Club)

Call: 683-6127, or mail this form and your contribution to: Portsmouth Concerned Citizens  
499 Wapping Rd.  
Portsmouth, RI 02871

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**ELECTION ISSUE**