



Portsmouth Concerned Citizens

NEWSLETTER

“Information is the currency of Democracy”

- Thomas Jefferson

www.portsmouthconcernedcitizens.org

Editor: Joe Robicheau
September 2, 2008
Volume IV, Edition 2

From the President -- Larry Fitzmorris

Get out and Vote – The September 9 Democrat Primary will decide who wins the three open School Committee seats in November. The PCC Endorsements are included in this edition.

A uniform political view – We in the PCC often find ourselves the object of criticism as those who are ‘polarizing or dividing’ the town. I often presume these remarks indicate a desire for a town with a uniform political view on local matters. That is, of course, the last thing we need. We in the PCC seek the open and vigorous discussion of public issues in local government. It is in this competition of views that we expect to find the best path. If a uniform political view was achieved, which is unlikely, then public discussion would not take place and we would lose the benefit of a full examination of the problem and potential solution. I also often find that those who wish an absence of public debate are those who also expect their views to be accepted as a matter of course.

In This Issue:

The PCC Endorsements – The members of the PCC present our endorsements for the Democrat Primary, which includes both Council and School Committee candidates.

The New Budget – The recent budget season has come to an end and the new budget for the current year has been adopted. A discussion of trends and shortcomings attempts to make a complex budget clear.

Who’s Running? – We provide a list of all the candidates running for local office in the coming election. Many are familiar faces, but a good number of new candidates are running for the first time.

School Committee History – The upcoming Primary for School Committee candidates is an opportunity to add responsible leadership for the next four years.

Helping Candidates – Joe Lorenz presents a list of candidate needs. If we expect elections to be competitive and new candidates to have a chance, the town’s citizens must support the candidates of their choice.

PCC Anniversary – Terry Lorenz reports on the very successful PCC Tenth Anniversary dinner.

PCC Endorsements

The PCC has evaluated the candidates running in the Democrat Primary. This effort involved questionnaires, interviews and observations at the PCC Candidates’ Night. The members of the PCC have voted to endorse the following candidates:

PCC Endorsements Democrat Primary September 9

Council
Mary Correia

School Committee
Marilyn King
Angela Volpecelli
Tom Vadney

The New Budget

(Larry Fitzmorris) The last week of June, the Council adopted the final Portsmouth budget which is, at its heart, a status quo budget. This budget preserves the financial trends of the last few years and levies the largest tax increase permitted by state law, absent an appeal to exceed the tax cap. The serious financial problems of the last few years, depleted town financial reserves, and large annual cost increases for salaries and benefits, remain uncorrected. On the bright side, the property tax increase, restrained by law, will be moderate for most property owners.

Portsmouth budget increases, which are for most property owners the direct cause of tax increases, are above average for municipalities in the state. Portsmouth ranks with a group of eight cities and towns that have increased their tax to the legal limit, with twenty-one communities increasing taxes at lower rates and seven communities appealing to the state to exceed the tax cap. So we in Portsmouth end up in the top 40% in terms of property tax increases in Rhode Island.

The good news is that property taxes will increase at approximately 3.0% (individual percentages will vary due to revaluation this year). This tax increase is not, however, a result of fiscal restraint by this Council, but rather a consequence of the Pavia-Weed property tax cap law. Without the tax cap law the tax increase would likely have been significantly higher. This budget is the maximum allowable under state law, without a formal appeal to state agencies to exceed the tax cap. In our Council, this would require six affirmative votes and there appeared to be only three votes to initiate an appeal.

Additionally, while the state and most municipal governments are facing severe pension and retirement obligation shortfalls, Portsmouth is not. Presently, the unfunded obligations for the municipal departments are about \$800,000 and for the school department they are approximately \$7,000. While the municipal figure looks large, it is manageable if we return to prudent budgetary practices.

The Problem with the Budget. The Tent meeting is not the cause of budget problems – as is repeatedly stated by some members of the Council and by the Town Administrator. The problem is overspending by the Council. Spending has exceeded revenue in far too many years. Even with the surviving budget reductions from the Tent Meeting, the Town’s operational budget increased 7.41% in the 06 – 07 fiscal year. That rate of increase was twice the current year’s increase of 3.74%.

Expenditures this year will once again exceed revenue. This budget relies on the selling off of town assets to generate sufficient capital to balance the budget. This is akin to subdividing your property to pay for a life style you cannot afford. This is the same road the Assembly took to put the state in a huge financial hole. This year’s budget is also one in which the Council continues to move operational budget costs into debt funded instruments such as bonds and warrants. That means that some of day-to-day costs of government are being converted into town debt, which is **not** subject to the tax cap. This approach is one that increases spending in the short term, at the expense of tax increases in the long term; as our friends in Tiverton have discovered.

Fund Balance. We in the PCC believe that the Council’s decisions pertaining to the Fund Balance over the last few years are irresponsible. While the Council recognizes the problem, corrective action is given only lip service in this budget. The Council is in serious violation of the Town Ordinance (2005-4-11A) governing the Fund Balance by not acting aggressively to correct the shortage. The Fund Balance is presently about \$1.0 million and with this year’s proposed contribution will increase marginally. It should be \$4.2 million.

Moody’s, the bond rating company, expects the Council to restore the Fund Balance by depositing 10% of the shortfall per year (\$300,000) into the Fund. If this schedule is maintained replenishment will take 10 years at best. We are off to a poor start. This year the Council intends to deposit 5%, but the funds are not actually in the budget. The intent is to sell off town property to generate revenue to make these deposits. In addition, the Council has actually withdrawn

another \$104,000 from the Fund Balance to pay for the debt service on the Wind Turbine bond. The Council and the town’s administration know that they are on dangerous ground, as they have already been warned by Moody’s about our bond rating. The Council has decided that other issues have a higher priority. We in the PCC believe that this deficit in the Fund Balance will eventually be presented as a justification for exceeding the tax cap. We don’t believe that the taxpayers should foot the bill for the Council’s mismanagement of town finances.

Restructuring. The Council must restructure the compensation package of municipal departments in order to stabilize the budget. Its decision to continue to increase spending in the salary and benefit sectors (at rates considerably above the maximum allowable in overall spending) has resulted in a budget that is unrealistic and unsustainable. To make matters worse, this budget reflects plans to hire two additional town employees. In the face of the state budget crises and the likelihood of a state recession, this is irresponsible. It is time for the Council and School Committee to live up to their responsibilities to taxpayers and reduce town government to a size that matches the revenue we provide.

Who’s Running

(Larry Fitzmorris) – This year there are more Democrat candidates than there are seats, necessitating a Democrat Primary in both the Council and School Committee races. The Republicans have fewer candidates than there are seats on the Council and no candidates for School Committee. There are also a considerable number of Independent candidates for the Council. Those who have filed are:

Council

Endorsed Democrats:

Dennis Canario*, David Croston, Albert Honnen, Leonard Katzman*, Mark Katzman, James Seveney*, William West*

Unendorsed Democrats:

Mary Correia

Independents:

Philip Driscoll, Karen Gleason*, Eugene Love, Judith Staven

Republicans:

Keith Hamilton, Hurbert Little*, Peter McIntyre*, Jeffery Plumb, Joseph Robicheau

School Committee

Endorsed Democrats:

Marilyn King, Angela Volpecelli, Sylvia Wedge*

Unendorsed Democrats:

Terri Cortvriend*, Tom Vadney

Town Clerk

Kathleen Viera Beaudoin*

* = Incumbents

School Committee History

(Larry Fitzmorris) – Incumbents should run on their record. In the September 9 primary election we have two candidates who are just finishing four years of service and this is the appropriate time to review their past decisions. While those elected to the School Committee represent the voters, most of the current membership remains completely submissive to the recommendations of the Superintendent. The majority has followed the recommendations of the administration, usually without challenge for some time, but it is the members of the Committee who hold the oversight responsibility and they ultimately are accountable. With this perspective I offer the following major votes for your review:

Major School Committee Issue Positions 2004 - 2008

Date	Issue	Supported
Nov 2004	Vote to reverse the decision of the voters on the gym design, substituting a field house design. Eventually reversed under heavy public pressure.	Wedge, Cortvriend
Mid 2005	Vote to request funding from the Council to cover the 04-05 deficit and the 05-06 shortfall while holding approximately \$200,000 at the Regional Special Ed.	Wedge, Cortvriend
May 2006	School Committee requests a budget with a 14.7% increase leading to a Tax Cap Appeal and the Tent Meeting.	Wedge, Cortvriend
Mid 2006	Paying former Dept. Financial Director Cindy Brown to go away.	Wedge, Cortvriend
Aug 2006	Walked out of the Tent Meeting.	Wedge, Cortvriend
Dec 2006	Voted in favor of a Caruolo suit against the taxpayers for additional funding.	Wedge, Cortvriend
Dec 2006	Demanding a stipulated settlement from the Council while continuing to hide Medicaid funds at Regional Special Ed.	Wedge, Cortvriend
May 2006	Disparaging remarks about Portsmouth's retired military. <i>"They don't contribute anything to this town,"</i>	Wedge

Helping Candidates

(Joe Lorenz) -- In an effort to encourage all citizens to engage in the process of electing Town and Assembly officials, the PCC has developed a comprehensive Election - 2008 Plan. One element of our Plan is to assist citizens in their support of the candidate(s) of their choice. The PCC as an organization does not support candidates with services or contributions. Individuals, however, may help any candidate. This is an important function of all citizens interested in improving our election process and government. Candidates will require help in a number of the following areas. Please contact the candidate(s) of your choice and volunteer! *Grass root efforts win elections!*

- Accompany candidate on house-to-house visits
- Accompany candidate at clambakes, fairs, etc.
- Display bumper sticker on auto

- Participate in telephone tree to get-out-the-vote
- Hold candidate signs, in teams, at high traffic areas
- Make monetary contribution
- Place sign(s) on lawn
- Hand out campaign brochures
- Attend candidate rallies and fundraisers
- Host "Meet The Candidate," at your home
- Distribute literature to households and businesses
- Perform computer data entry
- Volunteer for Election Day assignments
- Write letters-to-the-editor

PCC 10th Anniversary

(Terry Lorenz – 10th Anniversary Chairperson) - It was June of 1998 that Peter McIntyre formed Portsmouth Concerned Citizens (PCC). In 2002 Larry Fitzmorris became president and serves to this day.

Under the leadership of President Fitzmorris and the Executive Committee, the PCC has grown to over 450 members.

In realizing that it had been ten years since the forming of the PCC, it was understandable that a 10th Anniversary Party was essential.

Invitations to all members announced a Silent Auction to be held during the reception. On May 6, 2008 a dinner party was held at Green Valley Country Club in Portsmouth.

Members were very generous with the auction items they donated and over \$1,000 was raised during the reception.

After a lovely dinner with background music, abundant flowers, and a large cake (of course with candles and the PCC logo) it was time for our speakers.

Our keynote speaker, Helen Glover, WHJJ talk show host, spoke to the 88 members in an entertaining, intelligent and witty manner that was enjoyed by all. We were very fortunate to have her and her husband join us.

Next on the program was Harry Staley, Chairman of the Rhode Island Statewide Coalition. One is always fortunate to hear Mr. Staley speak with his wealth of statewide information.

Joseph Lorenz, Vice President of the PCC, thanked Helen Glover and Harry Staley for joining and addressing us with such timely information. He then invited to the podium the founding President, Peter McIntyre and current President, Larry Fitzmorris, who shared their insights in the organization's founding and contributions to Portsmouth.

The evening ended with our musical group "The Execs" which sent everyone home in laughter – with silent auction items.

By all accounts, everyone had an enjoyable evening complemented by good conversation, food, excellent speakers, and being a member of Portsmouth Concerned Citizens.

My very special and sincere "thank you" to all that made our 10th Anniversary celebration a success.

Portsmouth Concerned Citizens
PO Box 686
Portsmouth, Rhode Island 02871

STDPRSRT
US POSTAGE PAID
NEWPORT RI
PERMIT #286

PRIMARY ISSUE

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

If you are of the same mind...

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