

Town of Cohasset
Budget Planning Group
10/28/2009

In the past year, all of us have had to learn to live with less. Individuals, families, businesses and governments at all levels have experienced unprecedented challenges in making ends meet. The town of Cohasset is no exception. All indications are that our budget for the fiscal year beginning July 2010 will be extremely difficult. Yet in adversity often comes opportunity. To help the town make more thoughtful and participatory financial choices in the days and years ahead, the selectmen, last spring, created a Budget Planning Group (BPG). The purpose of this new body is to provide a long term financial planning capacity for the town. The objective is to look beyond the current year's budget to consider how to balance future budgets and to allow citizens adequate time to understand and consider the trade offs that occur when there is less money available. Do we reduce services, increase taxes, find new sources of revenue, seek greater efficiencies etc. The town is required by law to submit a balanced budget, so tough decisions need to be made and citizens have the right and obligation to be involved in those decisions in a timely way.

During the course of this summer and early fall, the BPG began looking at several budget scenarios and they are not pleasant. We have looked at the very real possibility of no State aid and we have looked at the possibility of a selected increase in state aid. We have examined possible changes in our own tax revenue as well as changes in expenditures. In trying to be realistic for FY 2011, we settled on what we refer to as a best guesstimate. This scenario yields a one million dollar shortfall for the fiscal year. This shortfall must be covered by a combination of reductions in budgeted expenditures and increases in revenues. If there are further cuts in outside funding the situation will doubtless be worse.

To prepare to town for what lies ahead, the BPG is considering options to deal with the developing fiscal crisis and to widen the universe of people involved in these discussions. We are examining all town operations to recommend efficiencies, identify impediments to savings, consider increases in revenues and develop any other changes that will improve town services and functions. We will, in the days and months ahead, be reaching out through articles like this in the Mariner and other forums in an effort to inform and involve a broader number of citizens in this choices the town faces.

The BPG is made up of appointed members of the Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Advisory Committee, Capital Budget Committee. The Town Manager, Town Finance Director, School Superintendent, and School Business Manager also participate.

The BPG meets on a regular basis (approximately monthly) and welcomes any and all input from citizens. In the coming months we will get more specific about the choices we are considering.

Our next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday November 17, 2009 in the basement of Town Hall.

Sam Wakeman
Chairman
Budget Planning Group