



# Aid to the Elderly and Disabled Tax Fund

## March 29, 2021

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Assistant Town Administrator/Finance Director

# Background - Aid to the Elderly and Disabled Tax Fund

Westwood has always been a community that cares deeply about our senior residents.

- All municipal taxation rules are mandated and controlled by the Department of Revenue
  - Municipalities cannot decide their own tax rules
  - State will offer options for local acceptance.
    - Examples:
      - Commercial Tax Shift
      - Tax Exemptions
- In 1998, the State looked to provide tax relief for seniors, and authorized the option for an Elderly and Disabled Tax Fund.
- The Fund's purpose:
  - Help seniors remain in homes in growing communities.
  - Provide real estate tax relief to qualifying, low income elderly and disabled residents.
  - Allow for donations to be made to a Fund.
  - Payment is applied directly to each recipient's tax bill.

## Westwood Established Fund to Help Seniors in 1999

- When the State option became available, the Town was experiencing tax impact as the excellent School system became increasingly popular:
  - School enrollment growth
  - School Construction Projects
    - Downey and Martha Jones major renovations
    - New High School
- At the 1999 Town Meeting, the Town approved the accepting State statute, establishing Westwood's Aid to the Elderly and Disabled Tax Fund
- Town Meeting adopted the State option as a way to assist long term, lower income residents with the impact of the school tax increases.

# How Does the Fund Work?

Overseen by Committee, as required by State law.

## Current Committee Members

- Michael Walsh, Select Board
- Patrick Ahearn, Town Counsel
- Al Wisialko, Tax Collector
- John Curran, Town Assessor
- Lina Arena DeRosa, Council On Aging Director
- Pam Dukeman, Assistant Town Administrator/ Finance Director
- Jim Gavin, Town Treasurer
- Josepha Jowdy, Council On Aging Board
- Janice Polin, Assistant Tax Collector

Each year, the committee confidentially considers all applications from elderly or disabled residents. The general eligibility guidelines include, but are not limited to the following:

- 65 years of age or older
- Annual income of less than \$55,000 verified by last filed federal income tax return.
- Home must be primary residence.
- There are no overhead or administrative costs, all funds are distributed every year.
- Goal is to assist long term Westwood residents who wish to remain in the Town and homes they love.

# How Appropriate Candidates are Identified

- The Fund helps to defray real estate tax cost and help long term residents to stay in their homes.
- In order to make the application process simple, the applications are readily available and easy to complete.
- Applications are available in various ways:
  - Town Hall
  - Council on Aging
  - Online on the Town Website
  - Insert in each quarterly tax bill
  - Annual separate mailing
- Candidates are also referred in many ways:
  - Council on Aging
  - Veterans Department
  - Community Groups
  - Friends and Neighbors

# How Is the Program Funded

- The State program originally adopted only allows the program to be funded through donations. In 2016, this expanded to allow Town funds.
- Westwood's Donation Sources
  - Some residents include a donation with their Real Estate Tax Bill payment
  - Annual donation appeal letter, typically mailed to each home in the fall
  - Corporate donations
  - Other Miscellaneous Sources
    - Charity close outs
    - Various groups around Town
    - Large individual donations
- Donations can be made online or via mail

## Our Residents Want to Help the Seniors

- As the Town continues to grow, and home values increase, the real estate bill increases.
- Our residents recognize this impact on their senior neighbors, who have lived for many years in Town and have helped build the Town

Westwood Residents who donate are happy to do so, and often send encouraging notes with their donations:

- “Our family would like to support the elderly and disabled in our town.”
- “Thank you for the opportunity to make a difference”

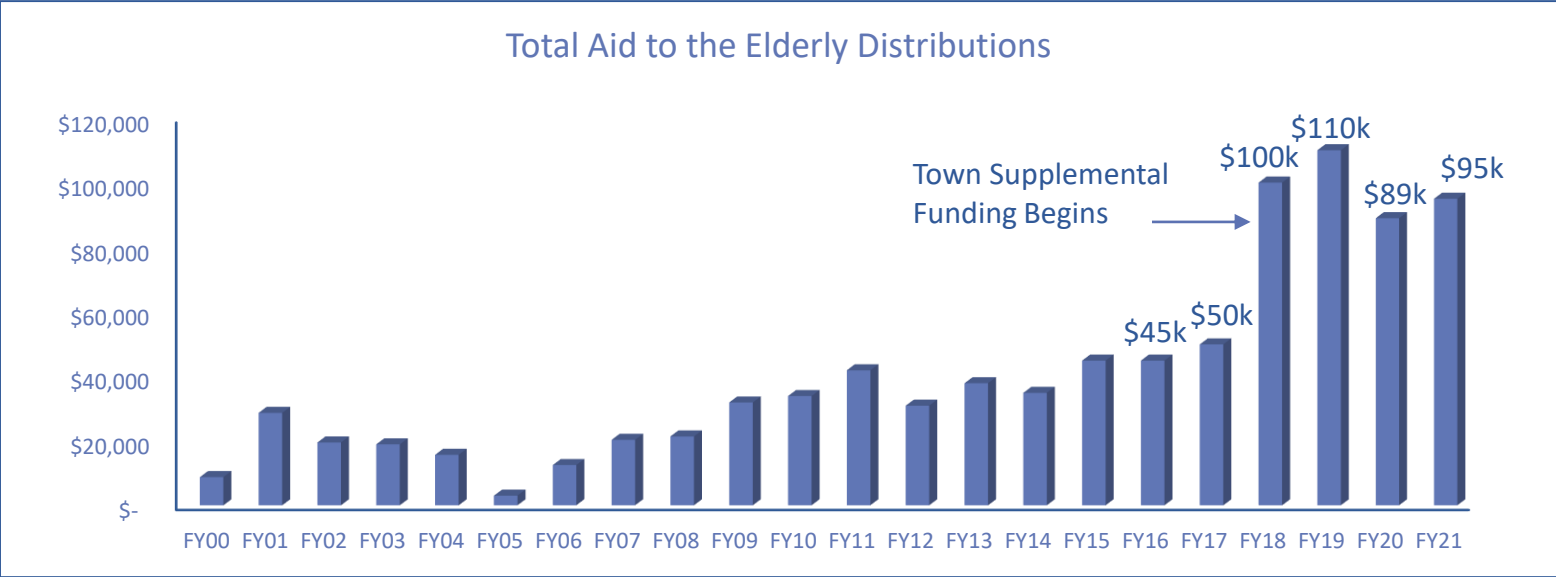
# Expanding Program Funding

- The Aid to the Elderly Committee looked at ways to increase the amount available to help seniors.
- The 2016 Annual Town Meeting approved by Home Rule petition and subsequent State approval, that Town funds could be used for the program
  - This allowed for greater distribution from the fund to our senior recipients.
    - Increased number of participants
    - Increased award amount
  - Since FY18, the Select Board has authorized an approximate transfer of \$55K from their reserve account to supplement donations.
  - The annual supplement approximately matches donations.



# Who Receives the Funding

- Typical Recipient:
  - 87 years old
  - Has lived in Westwood for over 50 years
  - Current Home value less than \$600,000



- Approximately 45-55 residents are assisted each year
- Since inception 22 years ago, fund has distributed a total of \$895,000 to our seniors.

# What the Funding Does

- Each year 45-55 residents receive assistance – list can change each year
  - Residents move out of Town or pass away.
  - New residents become eligible.
- Typical Distribution Award Amount per house
  - FY10 - FY17 \$800 - \$1,200
  - FY18 – FY19 \$2,500
  - FY20 – FY21 \$1,800
- The payment is approximately 20 – 25% of the Home's tax bill
  - Residents are still eligible for:
    - Senior Work Off
    - Other State Senior Tax Exemptions

# Our Seniors Feel Supported

- The funds distributed not only help with the tax bill, but make our seniors feel supported by the Town
- The program makes a difference
  - Our seniors are grateful to the Committee
  - Pleased to be able to remain in their homes

## Sample of Notes received:

- “Having grown up in this family home and seen how our town has grown around us, I am grateful to continue living here.”
- “At one time it was possible to contribute to the tax relief fund, never realizing someday I’d be a recipient. What a wonderful fund this is for those of us who have benefited from a generous award provided by many resident donors.”
- “Westwood, my home for 41 years, is a wonderful caring community. Thanks you so much for caring about me.”
- “Your generosity has made such a difference in my life, I thank each and every one of you every morning. Please know that I am very grateful and cannot thank you enough.”

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- “This is huge and this helps more than you can begin to imagine”
- “I want to thank you all...I was so flabbergasted, and so, so grateful. This award (\$2,500!) will make such a difference in my life: much less anxiety, you know plus the warming feeling of not being left to cope alone”
- “Thank you once again to the committee and resident contributors for my receiving the largest tax relief award in my ten years of these awards! As a happy resident of Westwood for 48 years, I can’t tell you how much it means to me to receive these awards that help reduce my real estate payments each year!”

# FY21 Distribution

- The Committee would like to distribute \$95K
- This will provide an approximate \$1,800 payment to 54 recipients
  - 45 returning recipients from prior year
  - 9 new recipients
- The Committee requests a supplement from the Select Board Reserve of \$55,000
  - Consistent with prior year transfers
    - FY18 \$50K
    - FY19 \$55K
    - FY20 \$55K

