

THIS FALL IN WESTWOOD

A COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Volume 16 Number 1

FALL 2003

Dear Westwood Residents,

As we begin our 16th year of the Westwood Community Newsletter, you will notice some changes. Budget cuts across the state, and this challenging economic climate, have resulted in the elimination by many towns of some desirable school and municipal programs and services. In Westwood, we too are experiencing fiscal stress. As one result, this newsletter, once funded through the cooperation of the schools and the municipal government, is now being funded solely by the municipal government. We hope that when financing becomes available, the school department will once again help produce this newsletter. Meanwhile, in order to retain the newsletter and be fiscally responsible, the format and length needs to be altered.

But, as we begin our 16th year of the Westwood Community Newsletter, we will strive to retain the same in-depth coverage and provide residents with information about our town and its happenings. An informed citizenship remains our goal.

We are adding the "Bulletin Board" and "Did You Know" features of the newsletter as an insert, with the hope that you will post the loose page on your refrigerator and therefore attend what is happening in town. An active citizenship is also our goal.

And so dear readers, the heart and soul of our town remains in the pages of this newsletter; we look forward to continuing to serve you — with pleasure and as a privilege.

Barbara Friedman
Editor



New Police Chief William G. Chase being sworn in by Town Clerk Edie McCracken. Chairman of the Board of Selectmen Anthony Antonellis is on the right.



Gerard Cronin receives the first John J. Cronin Public Service Award. John J. Cronin, Jr., Betty Cronin and Jake Cronin III presented the award.

Coalition of Boards Examines Commercial Development

SUPPORT FOR GROWTH OF COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

With the Board of Selectmen's support, Selectman Nancy Hyde held a joint meeting on June 19th of several town boards to discuss how to encourage and support stability and growth in the town's commercial tax base. Gathered were a total of almost thirty members from the Board of Assessors, Conservation Commission, Business Development Advisory Board (BDAB), Finance Commission, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals.

Understanding the Need

There are only two ways for the town to increase net operating revenue: an override of Proposition 2¹/₂ or a growth in commercial property values. According to Pam Dukeman, the Finance Director, current trends indicate that the town "cannot support even a 3% growth to the operating budgets in the next few years" without an increase in commercial values or a Proposition 2¹/₂ override.

Westwood utilizes a split tax rate, also known as a tax shift. The tax shift allocates proportionately more of the property tax levy to commercial properties and less to residential properties relative to their full and fair market value. This means that businesses pay a higher property tax rate than do homeowners. The use of this split rate vs. a single tax rate results in an annual property tax savings of \$651 for the average Westwood homeowner. (Savings for the average resident of a home valued \$468,075. Source: Finance Commission)

Westwood is fortunate that the commercial property values grew by 3% last year. On the other hand, the residential property values increased at an even greater rate of 40%. As a result, the total commercial value

dropped from 19% to 15% of total value and the total residential value rose from 81% to 85% of total value. This imbalance structurally limits how much tax can be shifted to the commercial sector in order to continue the savings to residential taxpayers. If this trend continues, eventually there will not be enough property value within the commercial sector for the town to maintain a split tax rate and to maintain the average annual residential tax savings of \$651. In addition, commercial taxpayers are lower users of town services, such as schools. The residential sector by contrast is a full service user.

By-Law Revisions Possible

A committee has been formed of the Chairpersons of the Board of Assessors, Conservation Commission, Business Development Advisory Board, Planning Board, and Zoning Board of Appeals with Selectman Nancy Hyde representing the Board of Selectmen, and the Town Administrator, Finance Director, Town Planner, and Business Liaison serving as ex-officio members. The committee will divide into sub-committees each to focus on one of the town's two major commercial areas — (1) University Avenue Park and (2) Route 1. The mission of the subcommittees is "to provide economic stability and expansion of our commercial tax base in Westwood."

University Avenue alone represents 54% of the value of commercial real estate in Westwood. This subcommittee expects to make strides to increase those values. Within University Avenue Park there is the potential to increase the values by almost 80%. University Avenue retail is now strictly limited to convenience retail, and the

current square foot limitation has precluded development of the amenities required for a first class commercial development. Other zoning requirements make it impossible for at least five existing University Avenue properties to convert to office use without complete demolition.

Under examination is the permitting process and the zoning of these two areas. The subcommittees have discussed preliminary revisions that may be needed to the Town's zoning bylaw in terms of the sign regulations, dimensional regulations and allowed uses for the two commercial areas. Currently, both areas are zoned for retail, office, warehouse and light industrial with some dimensional distinctions between the areas.

Parallel to this effort, the BDAB has been meeting with landlords, commercial developers and economic development professionals to understand the perceptions, problems and potential for the two areas. The BDAB wants to assess the viability in the marketplace of any changes the Town makes. An example cited to the BDAB has been ceiling heights. To attract the biotechnology companies, one of Massachusetts' growing industries, the ceiling heights would need to be a minimum of 12' and the overall height may need to be the equivalent of four stories.

The BDAB will look at the current bylaw and determine if its restrictions are appropriate for the current marketplace or whether the restrictions are outdated.

Send all correspondence to:
Westwood Community Newsletter
580 High Street
Westwood, MA 02090
Barbara M. Friedman, *Editor*

Did You Know . . .

- **The Westwood Public Library will launch a community reading campaign early in 2004.** The purpose is to have as many people in Westwood read the selected books, one for adults and one for children, and participate in discussions and other programs. The one book-one town concept was initiated by the Washington Center for the Book in 1998 and has enjoyed wide popularity throughout the country. Funding for the program will come from the Westwood Educational Foundation and other sources.

- **The Westwood Historical Society will hold two events this fall and open two exhibits. On Oct 14th Bill Patten, Jr. will present “Norman Rockwell”** — his life and career as the nation’s beloved illustrator and storyteller. Following that will be a presentation of the **Quarter Century Award**. Each year the Historical Society presents the Quarter Century Award to a person or couple who have made an outstanding contribution to the community for more than 25 years, making Westwood a better place to live. The contribution could be in any field such as education, religion, arts, or social service. Previous recipients of the honorary tribute are (chronologically beginning in 1990): Yetta and Alexander Fisher, Barbara and Allan Beale, Donald MacLellan, Allen Baker, Richard Youlden, Ellie and Roy London, Lillian Perkins, Robert Wood, Gordon Youlden, Tom Dunn, Joseph Weider, Emlen and Jim Wheeler, and Duncan and Ellen McFarland.

On Nov 11th David Krug will present, “The Big Dig: Boston’s Expansion through History”.

David Krug, a well known lecturer, illustrates, with slides, Boston’s expansion including the building of tunnels and bridges throughout the years, the phases of the giant project, and the latest update.

On October 5th “Art and Artists: Past and Present” will be exhibited. The exhibit

includes a 1780 watercolor of the first Ellis Tavern, showing the “Sign of the White Horse” attributed to Mary Onion Colburn, an early resident of West Dedham; an unusual hand drawn linear map dated 1810 by William Ellis, showing the “Distance from Walpole Meeting House and the Meeting House in the third Parish” (Clapboardtree Meeting House); tin stencils used in the early 1900s by Lucius Damrell, designer of the Town’s Seal, for his painting and decorating business; a powder horn with hand carved designs by Porter Brook ca. 1940; a Westwood scene by Margaret Philbrick, “June Morning;” and a unique hand carved Coat of Arms by Frederick Brunner, who also designed and created the exquisite wood carving of the Town Seal permanently displayed at the Westwood Public Library. Of special interest are the color photos of Harold Ionson at work making museum quality reproductions of Thomas Seymour’s 1809 Derby commode. The tops of the commodes are decorated with paintings of sea shells by Jonathan Fairbanks, former Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts. Many other works

of art will also be on display, including several by contemporary Westwood artists.

November 2nd “West Dedham/ Westwood Businesses”. On display will be items in the collection showing the types of businesses in the community. See the Town Bulletin Board for details regarding times and location.

- **The Charles River YMCA will be holding a Y-Club Westwood, located in Thurston Middle School, for the 2003-2004 school year.** Y-Club Westwood is an after school program specifically designed for 6th to 8th graders. There is time to hang out and socialize, work on homework (with staff assistance as needed), as well as participate in 5-8 clubs per week. Clubs may include: Leaders Club, Earth Service Club, RAD kids, Leaders in Training for 8th Graders, Sports, Babysitting, Fitness, Swimming, Crafts, Movies and more. The hours are from 2:30 p.m. (or school dismissal) to 6:30 p.m. Students can choose from 1 day to 5 days per week. For information regarding rates, financial assistance or any questions, please contact Laurie Spindler, Youth and Teen Director, Charles River YMCA at 781-444-6400 x236 or via email at lspindler@ymcaboston.org.
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TOWN BULLETIN BOARD

TOWN AND SCHOOL EVENTS AND HOLIDAYS

- Oct 4 Historical Society Giant Yard Sale, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.
Fisher School, 830 High Street
Drop off: Sat., Sept 27th, 9 a.m.-12 p.m.,
Fisher School
Call Joan Murphy for further details.
- Oct 5 Exhibit: **"Art and Artists: Past and Present"**
Westwood Historical Society
2-4 p.m., Fisher School, 830 High Street
- Oct 14 **"Norman Rockwell"** – Lecture and
Quarter Century Award
Westwood Historical Society
7:30 p.m., Fisher School, 830 High Street
Handicapped Accessible

- Nov 2 **"West Dedham/Westwood Businesses"**
Westwood Historical Society
2-4 p.m., Fisher School, 830 High Street
- Nov 11 **"The Big Dig: Boston's Expansion
Through History"**
Westwood Historical Society
7:30 p.m., Fisher School, 830 High Street
Handicapped Accessible

PUBLIC LIBRARY PROGRAMS

Main Library Programs for Preschoolers

- Sept 15-Oct 20 **Activity Time**-Ages 2 & up with caregiver
Nov 10-Dec 15 Mondays, 10:15-11:00 a.m.
- Sept 16-Oct 21 **Parent/Child Storytime**-Ages 2^{1/2} and up
Nov 18-Dec 16 with caregiver
Tuesdays, 10:15-11:00 a.m.
- Sept 17-Oct 22 **Storytime**-Ages 3^{1/2} and up
Nov 12-Dec 17 Wednesdays, 10:15-11:00 a.m.

Children must be the appropriate age by the first day of each session. A lottery style registration for Westwood residents will be held from August 6-September 3. The lottery will be held on September 4 and postcards will be mailed on September 5. Non-residents may call the library to inquire if any storytime spaces are available after September 4. There are no sessions during public school vacations or holidays or snow days.

- Sept 19-Oct 24 **Babies & Books**-Under 2 years with
Nov 14-Dec 19 caregiver
Fridays, 10:10-10:30 a.m.
Registration is not required.

Main Library Programs for School Age Children

- Sept 16-Oct 21 **Wishing Well**-Ages 5 and up
Nov 18-Dec 16 Tuesdays, 3:30-4:30 p.m.
Registration begins Aug 6.

Special Programs at Main Library

- Oct 4, Nov 1 **Storytelling Saturdays**-Ages 2^{1/2} and up
with families
Saturdays, 10:30-11:30 a.m.
Registration begins 1 month prior.
- Sept 15, 29, **BookMates Book Club**-Grades 3-5
Oct 20, Nov 3, Mondays, 3:45-4:45 p.m.
Nov 17 Registration begins Aug 6.

- Oct 31 **Halloween Party and Parade**
Friday, 10:30 a.m. All ages.
Registration is not required.
Costumes may be worn.
- TBA **A Story for Every Season**-All ages
An Early Childhood Council, Council on
Aging and Library CPC Program
Registration will be required —
please call the COA.

Main Library Social Hours

- Oct 2, Nov 6 Early Childhood Council/Library Program
Dec 4 Thursdays, 9:30-11:00 a.m.
Social and educational hours for families.
Registration begins two weeks prior to
programs.

*Social Hours are also held at the Recreation Department.
Call 781-461-0070 for dates and times.*

Islington Branch Programs

- Sept 18-Oct 23 **Storytime**-Ages 3^{1/2} and up
Nov 13-Dec 18 Thursdays, 9:30-10:15 a.m.
Registration required.
- Oct 7, 14 **Young Readers Book Club**-Grades 2-4
Oct 21, 28 Tuesdays, 3:30-4:15 p.m.
Registration is required.

*For further information, please call the
Main Library Children's Department at 781-320-1042
or the Islington Branch at 781-326-5914
or visit the web site at www.westwoodlibrary.org/home.*

Board of Health News

MERCURY EXCHANGE PROGRAM

The Westwood Board of Health is conducting a Thermometer Exchange Program. Residents are encouraged to check their medicine cabinets, collect their old glass mercury fever thermometers and bring them to the Board of Health office at the Town Hall from 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday and exchange them for a new digital fever thermometer free of charge. The program, sponsored by Wheelabrator Millbury, Inc., in cooperation with the Westwood Board of Health, is designed to remove mercury thermometers from the municipal solid waste stream prior to disposal at the incinerator in Millbury where they could be released into the environment through the combustion process. Each mercury thermometer contains .7 grams of mercury. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has identified discarded thermometers as the single highest contributor of mercury to the municipal waste stream.

What is mercury and why is it a problem?

Mercury is a naturally occurring element found in rocks, soils, water, air, and living organisms. Mercury is a very dense element so it expands and contracts evenly with temperature changes and has high electrical conductivity. This silvery-white metal, liquid at room temperature, can readily change from a solid, to a gas, to a liquid. Because of these very unique properties, mercury has been used in thousands of industrial, agricultural, medical, and household application.

Mercury is a neurotoxin. Exposure to high levels can cause permanent damage to the brain and kidneys, as well as causing harm to the developing fetus. Exposure to mercury can cause personality changes, tremors, changes in vision, loss of sensation and memory. Small amounts of mercury can have serious impact on the environment. Mercury evaporates easily, travels in the atmosphere, and is deposited into soil and water. The mercury that enters lakes, ponds, rivers and oceans accumulates in fish tissue

and concentrates as larger fish eat smaller fish.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife have issued a Fish Consumption Advisory informing pregnant women about the possible health risks to a developing fetus from mercury in certain freshwater fish. There are now 79 lakes, ponds, and rivers in Massachusetts that have fish advisories because of mercury.

The Thermometer Exchange Program is one component of the larger Mercury Recovery Program being offered to Westwood residents which will also collect mercury thermostats and mercury switches. The kick-off Thermometer Exchange Program is meant to educate residents about mercury, its potential impact on health and the environment and to instruct residents how to properly dispose of products that contain mercury. For more information on the Thermometer Exchange and the Mercury Recovery Program please contact Linda Shea, Health Director at (781) 320-1026.

Department of Public Works News

ROADWAY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Department of Public Works has expended its Chapter 90 funds, which are administered by the State to provide maintenance and improvements to several of Westwood's 86.5 miles of roadways. The improvements are consistent with a long-range plan developed in 1990 that is updated each year.

This year, the Town milled and repaved Dover Road, High Rock Street, a section of Gay Street from Washington to Mill, and a section of Grove Street from High Street to Country Club Drive. In September the Town will infrared (heat and liquefy the surface) and apply a new wearing surface to Spring Lane, Old Stone Road, and Clapboardtree

Street, from Manor Lane to Thatcher Street. The Town also applied a thin layer of asphalt to the surface of High Street (Route 109) from Lowder Brook Road to Nahatan Street, to hold the road together until the State awards the reconstruction project. If new Chapter 90 moneys are approved and advocated by the State, the next streets to be repaved are Summer Street and East Street.

Although the Town has made significant progress in maintaining and replacing its Town roadways, there continues to be a growing backlog. The April 2003 update indicates that there is a 5.8 million dollar backlog of work yet to be

accomplished, which includes rehabilitation of the subsurface base of roadways (4.5 million) structural roadway improvement (.6 million), preventive maintenance (.6 million), and routine maintenance (.04 million). This backlog has increased by .7 million dollars since 2001 when it was estimated to be 5.1 million dollars. Over the last few years the State, faced with budget deficits, has reduced its annual Chapter 90 funding for Westwood from a high of \$403,547.00 to a low of \$136,256.63. In the current fiscal year, it is hoped that the State will provide \$269,031.00.

Planning Board News

ZONING RECODIFICATION

For many residents, a first look at the Town's Zoning Bylaw can be a confusing and perplexing experience — the needed information is often difficult to find and the legalese language can be daunting. Common questions include: what is the minimum setback distance for an accessory structure in a particular zoning district? Or what is the process for obtaining a special permit to construct a porch on a house that is existing non-conforming? Or just what is the difference between a special permit and a variance? Yet answers seem hard to understand.

Initially adopted in 1929, the Westwood Zoning Bylaw has undergone numerous revisions, resulting in a complex, often difficult-to-read document. For the first time since its adoption over 60 years ago, the Bylaw and its years of amendments, which have been written by the Planning Board, various outside consultants and by resident petitions, will undergo a comprehensive review, called a recodification.

A committee consisting of members of the Planning Board, Board of Appeals, Finance Commission, Business Development Advisory Board and Town staff, including the Town Planner, Town Counsel, Building Commissioner and Town Administrator are currently working with a consultant to conduct the recodification. The process, which began in fall 2002, will take approximately two years.

First Steps Change Narration to Tables

The first set of zoning amendment articles were unanimously approved by the 2003 Town Meeting and focused primarily on structural changes to the

Bylaw, most notably a change from a more narrative approach to a table approach. Now, rather than having to flip through several sections to determine if a specific use is allowed in the Highway Business and Industrial Districts, a resident can quickly view all the permitted uses in all zoning districts in one easy-to-read table. Also, accessory uses, which used to be dispersed throughout the Bylaw in various sections, are now located in one easily identifiable section.

Changes in Obtaining Permits for Reconstruction

Another approved change allows for a resident to alter an existing non-conforming structure in certain ways with only a building permit. Previously, these alternations required a discretionary special permit from the Board of Appeals. Also, the Bylaw now allows for a resident to demolish an existing non-conforming structure and rebuild a new (and often larger) structure if granted a special permit by the Board of Appeals. This was previously prohibited which sometimes resulted in the "one wall" problem (i.e. one wall would be left standing so as not to meet the complete demolition prohibition) that can result in an inferior design and appearance for the new construction. Since the approval of this Bylaw at the 2003 Town Meeting, the Board of Appeals has issued five demolition/reconstruction special permits, with many more applications still pending.

Defining Terms, Condensing, and Categorizing

Other approved changes to the Bylaw include adding over 60 new definitions of words that are used in the Bylaw and

condensing the number of activities that site plan review into broader categories. Also, specific decision criteria and procedural requirements were added to the Special Permits section, to ensure that all applicants understand the criteria used by boards in reviewing their applications.

Town Meeting also approved the consolidation of the Bylaw's four separate provisions for senior housing, which were often confusing and redundant, into one new Senior Residential Development section. In the past, developers and property owners have shied away from presenting appropriate 55+ empty-nester-type housing because of the complexities of these previous sections.

Future Plans

For Town Meeting 2004, the Zoning Recodification Committee will review the remaining sections to the Bylaw dealing with parking regulations, residential and business accessory uses, alternative development bylaws, signs and parking, among others. The Committee will also be working closely with the ad-hoc committee recently established by the Board of Selectmen and Business Development Advisory Board to identify long and short term alternatives to enhance the Town's commercial tax base, which may include potential zoning changes.

The Zoning Recodification Committee will meet again in mid-September (meetings are open to the public). For additional information on the Zoning Bylaw recodification process, please contact the Planning Board at 781-251-2581.

This Fall in Westwood
580 High Street
Westwood, MA 02090

Presort Standard U.S. Postage PAID Permit #22 Westwood MA 02090

RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER

Westwood, MA 02090