

## **TOWN MANAGER**

Over the past few months we have experienced a winter that leads to expressions "When I was younger we had to walk through snow worse than this winter". While that may be true, this has been a winter with far more snow than normal and colder weather than normal. The good news has been the performance of our Public Works employees and contractors keeping the roads open. However, this has resulted in a huge financial drain on the Town's budget.

In dealing with the Town's budget the news is not good due to the confluence of a poor economy and major budgetary problems at the State level which resulted in the first time in my tenure that Local Aid to Tewksbury was reduced after both the Commonwealth's and Town's budgets were adopted. Through the efforts of re-structuring, reducing staffing and down grading positions, Tewksbury was able to weather this reduction without a significant impact on service levels. However, I can not guarantee that this will continue in FY04 or FY05 with further reductions in Local Aid, a continuing stagnant economy, and opposition to major economic development efforts. Thus, the question for you the residents to answer over the next few months will be whether Tewksbury will maintain its service improvements over the past decade – smaller class sizes, condominium trash pick up, expanded library services, re-opening of the North Street Fire Station, and the level of police coverage – or reduce them.

Despite the winter and threatening budget problems, Tewksbury has made progress in a number of ways over the past several months. An independent rating agency, ISO, has reviewed the Town's public safety and water services and upgraded the Town's rating. While this does not benefit homeowners due to insurance industry practices, it will benefit commercial property owners' fire insurance premiums.

Through the efforts of the Town's Fire, Police and Health Departments, Tewksbury was one of four communities in the Northeastern Massachusetts region recognized as a "Heart Safe" community which should indicate to residents the quality of these services.

Progress continues on the Master Sewer Plan. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has authorized the Town to proceed with construction of the Phase 6 sewer program which will be bid this Spring and start construction this Summer while an Environmental Impact Report is proposed on the remaining phases. Survey work has started on Phase 7 and a rate study has been completed.

Designs are almost complete for the sludge disposal system at the Water Treatment Plant. At present, the only delay in bidding the project is that the DEP is understaffed to review the plans and may take the full 90 days to approve the plans.

Negotiations with Wheelabrator has resulted in attaining excellent price proposals for FY06-FY10. The only constraint is negotiation over the contract language which hopefully will be resolved by the end of March.

While the delay in opening the Wynn School has been frustrating, the good news is that the Building Commissioner raised issues concerning egress from the building which are being addressed now rather than sometime in the future.

Looking ahead, Town staff is committed to seeking improvements which will result in cost savings and will be open to exploring many ideas. However, at some point over the next several months, you, the residents, will be called upon to make certain choices over which Town services will be maintained, reduced or eliminated.

## **TEWKSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

### **Message from the Superintendent of Schools**

#### **Tewksbury Public Schools Town Wide Parent Advisory Council Hosts Eleventh Annual Children's Opportunity Fair**

The Eleventh Annual Children's Opportunity Fair will take place on **Tuesday April 8, 2003 from 6:30 to 8:00 PM** in the cafeteria of the **John F. Ryan Elementary School**.

The Fair will feature about 40 organizations that offer recreational, cultural, athletic, enrichment and academic programs for school age students. The Fair also includes performances by many of the organizations.

A police detail will be on hand at the Ryan School to direct drivers to all available parking spaces. In addition shuttle bus service will be provided between the Ryan School and additional parking at Tewksbury Memorial High School. A book fair and a bake sale will be available during the Fair. Proceeds from the Fair will benefit the John W. Wynn Middle School Library.

Over 400 members of the community attended the Tenth Annual Children's Opportunity Fair. They received many brochures and had the opportunity to question program representative about the specific program components, daily schedules and fees.

We hope that you will attend the Fair to learn about the many after-school and summer programs which are available in our area. Please contact the **Office of the Superintendent at 978-640-7800** if you would like to register your organization to participate in the Fair.

Christine L. McGrath, Ph.D  
Superintendent of Schools

## **FIRE DEPARTMENT**

### **Nightclub safety tips**

Every day, millions of people wake up, go to work or school, and take part in social events. But every so often the unexpected happens: an earthquake, a fire, a chemical spill, an act of terrorism or some other disaster. Routines change drastically, and people are suddenly aware of how fragile their lives and routines can be. Each disaster can have lasting effects - people may be seriously injured or killed, and devastating and costly property damage can occur.

The Station nightclub fire in West Warwick, RI, was a disaster of historical proportion. People entering any public assembly building need to be prepared in case of an emergency.

#### **Should you enter?**

\* **Take a good look**

Does the building appear to be in a condition that makes you feel comfortable? Is the main entrance wide and does it open outward to allow easy exit? Is the outside area clear of materials stored against the building or blocking exits?

#### **Before you enter**

\* **Have a communication plan**

Identify a relative or friend beforehand to contact in case of emergency and you are separated from family or friends.

\* **Plan a meeting place**

Pick a meeting place outside to meet family or friends with whom you are attending the function. If there is an emergency, be sure to meet them there.

#### **When you enter**

\* **Locate exits immediately**

When you enter a building, look for all available exits. Are the exits clearly marked and well lit? Some exits may be in front and some in back of you. Always be prepared to use the exit closest to you. (You may not be able to use the main exit.)

\* **Check for clear exit paths**

Make sure aisles are wide enough and not obstructed by chairs or furniture. Check to make sure your exit door is not blocked or chained. If there are not at least two clearly marked exits or exit paths are blocked, report the violation to management and leave the building if it is not immediately addressed. Call the local fire marshal to register a complaint.

\* **Do you feel safe?**

Does the building appear to be overcrowded? Are there fire sources such as candles burning, cigarettes or cigars burning, pyrotechnics, or other heat sources that may make you feel unsafe? Are there safety systems in place such as alternative exits, sprinklers, and smoke alarms? Ask the management for clarification on your concerns. If you do not feel safe in the building, leave immediately.

#### **During an emergency**

\* **React immediately**

If an alarm sounds, you see smoke or fire, or other unusual disturbances immediately exit the building in an orderly fashion. Use your closest exit – keep in mind that it may not be the main exit.

\* **Get out, stay out!**

Once you have escaped, stay out. Under no circumstances should you ever go back into a burning building. Let trained firefighters conduct rescue operations.

Take the time to learn about the public assembly buildings you may enter so that you know what to do if the unexpected happens.

## **DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

Good News! The light at the corner of Livingston Street and Main Street is scheduled to be started early April weather permitting. This much needed addition will allow traffic to flow with more ease at this busy intersection.

The new sewer expansion program which includes Phases 6 – 11 is scheduled to begin in June of 2003. This program should take about seven years to complete. If residents have any question they may contact the DPW or the Engineering Department located on Whipple Road to find out when their street is scheduled.

As usual we would like to make residents aware that the DPW will be repairing snow and ice damage as soon as weather permits and our daily schedule allows. We appreciate your patience in this matter.

William R. Burris Jr.,  
Superintendent

## **BOARD OF ASSESSORS**

The Massachusetts Department of Revenue, (DOR), requires all cities and towns to revalue all property once every three years.

Tewksbury's next revaluation is scheduled for FY2004. All property assessments will be updated to reflect values as of January 1, 2003. Those values will be determined using sales data from calendar year 2002.

DOR closely monitors the revaluation project from planning to data quality assurance to analysis to conclusion. Revaluation certification by DOR is required before the FY2004 tax rate can be set.

The objective of the revaluation is to ensure that all property is fully and fairly assessed.

The Board of Assessors will use approximately 600 property sales that occurred in 2002 to set values for all 11000 parcels in the town. The sales used are those determined to be reflective of the real estate market. Sales between family members or business associates, for example, will not be used in this analysis.

The last town-wide revaluation was done for fiscal year 2001, using 1999 sales. Residential assessments increased by 30-35% at that time. Preliminary indications are that the increase in assessed values for fiscal year 2004 may be in that range or greater.

Increased assessments, however, do not translate directly into higher tax bills. In a revaluation year the tax rate typically drops, as it did in fiscal years 2001 and 1998.

DOR also requires, prior to final approval, that the Board of Assessors undertake a public disclosure program. The program in Tewksbury will consist of two components. First, a public information release, published in a local newspaper, will describe the basis of the changes, the overall effect on assessments and the manner and time period for taxpayers to inquire about new assessments prior to tax billing. Second, the assessors will provide a 2 week time period, during regular and extended business hours, for taxpayers to inquire about proposed new values.

The Board of Assessors will be providing more information on this program as it progresses over the next several months.

## **COLLECTORS OFFICE**

**REMINDER: TO RESIDENTS THAT 4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTER REAL ESTATE AND PERSONAL PROPERTY TAXES ARE DUE ON MAY 1, 2003.**

### **BILLING CHANGES AND ALTERNATIVE PAYMENT METHODS**

#### **MAILING CHANGE**

Due to the increase in postage and mailing fees, all future real estate bills will be mailed semi-annually. Taxes will continue to be due quarterly (August 1, November 1, February 1, May 1). The only change will be in the number of mailings. First and second quarter will be mailed the last week of June, third and fourth quarter will be mailed the last week of December.

#### **DROP OFF BOX**

For your convenience, in October a drive-up payment drop off box was installed on the side of the Town Hall Annex. All payments dropped off after 3:00pm will be credited the next business day.

#### **MAKE PAYMENTS ON LINE**

A new program is being offered by Metropolitan Communications called Resident Pay, whereby you can pay your excise, real estate and current water bills on the Internet. You will be logging onto a secure encrypted web site with your own username and password. You will then authorize tax payments via an electronic ACH (Automatic Clearinghouse) transfer from your bank account to our bank account. The fee for using this web site is \$.025 per transaction, (Not a credit card site). If you are interested in paying your real estate tax online, please go to [www.mcc.net](http://www.mcc.net) and fill out the online Resident Pay registration form.

**CHANGE IN HOURS**

October 1, 2002 there was a change in office hours. On Tuesdays the office will be open 8:30 am till 7:00 p.m.

Dorothy A. Lightfoot  
Collector