

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

November 11, 2005

(#42)

I want to thank all of the voters who took the time to vote in the November 8th election. Certainly, the outcome of the First Selectman's race was not what my supporters had hoped for, but 40% of the vote --the strongest showing of any challenger in recent memory—represents a milestone we are proud of. I want my supporters, as well as those who did not vote for me, to know that I will continue to push for open, honest, and efficient government that acts on behalf of all North Haveners, not just the well-connected.

One of the major issues I have been working on is to delay revaluation. Recently, new residential assessments have been distributed and the news is not good; there's shock at the high assessments. Many people have realized that their assessments are already out of date, reflecting values at the height of the real estate bubble. Unless we act now, these high assessments will cause residential property tax bills to go up in July, and will remain the value you are taxed on until 2009. What can be done about this situation?

First, understand that it is not too late to delay revaluation. Yes, that's right. The arrival of these notices does not mean that North Haven cannot delay revaluation. Case in point: New Haven recently announced their decision to delay reval after their assessments had been completed.

To delay revaluation in North Haven, the Board of Selectmen must act soon. So far, my colleagues on the Board have refused, even though the First Selectman is well aware that going through with reval is bad news for residents. No wonder then that the new assessments have come out ten days *after* the election!

I intend to bring up the reval issue at every opportunity in order to save North Haven residents an unnecessary tax increase. But to get reval delayed, I need your help. Call Town Hall to let them know that you want reval delayed. It is always important that government not saddle residents with unnecessary tax hikes. Today, the reval issue takes on heightened importance. In future columns, I will explain my vision for making local government more efficient while holding the line on taxes.

SELECTIONS

Selectwoman Janet McCarty

December 4, 2005
(#43)

On November 30th, newly elected Town Officials took the oath of office, promising to faithfully execute their duties. I was proud to be among those taking the oath and I intend to faithfully advocate for the issues that galvanized my supporters during the campaign. Chief among those is providing open, honest, and efficient government that acts on behalf of all North Haven residents.

An inauguration is a time for a new beginning. The First Selectman and I have the opportunity to make a fresh start to work together for what is best for North Haven. Accordingly, I have asked Mr. Kopetz to keep me informed of all meetings and events relating to the town. The reason is simple: if the First Selectman and I are to work together, then he must include me in the governing process.

As of this writing, Town Hall has not responded to this request for information, and they may not (unless it is required by the Freedom of Information Act—more on this in a future column). But I believe it is appropriate to give the First Selectman the opportunity to do the right thing, and to treat me as a bona fide member of the Board of Selectmen.

If he does so, I promise to work with him to do what is most advantageous for North Haven. I want to make it clear, however, that I will continue to act as the loyal opposition and fight for what I believe in. I appreciate that we will not agree on all of the issues (e.g. delaying revaluation), but reasoned debate of issues certainly will be healthy for our town. Through debate, the best ideas emerge and hopefully win, which means North Haven residents win, too.

Another benefit of having frank debates is that discussion leads to clearer understanding, which in turn, results in clarity regarding the choices we are facing as a town. Inquiry, whether by the press, the people, or officials, is good for government; it forces elected officials to justify their actions, and it helps ensure that officials are choosing what is truly best for everyone.

I look forward to keeping you informed of important issues and topics through this column and through the accompanying NHTV show, also named Selections. Stay tuned!

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

December 18, 2005

(#44)

The holidays are a good time to reflect that, despite all of our differences, we have many things in common and much to celebrate about our town. Young or old, rich or poor, Democrat, Unaffiliated or Republican, we all have a stake in the success of North Haven. This outlook is one that all of us, especially our political leaders, would do well to keep in mind throughout the year.

There are many challenges facing us in the next year. Certainly the impending increase in residential property taxes is one of them. The fall-out from significant tax hikes due only to this year's revaluation will certainly have a negative impact on town services and on education. Thus, one of my New Year's wishes is for us to have a referendum on the issue of delaying revaluation. Let the people vote on this important issue. The Board of Selectmen could restore the power to the people—the legislative body of North Haven—power that was denied them through a quirk in legislation.

Another goal I have for our town is to give residents more opportunities to get involved in government decision-making. One way to encourage this is by holding meetings at times that are convenient for the public. Moreover, we should televise all major Board and Commission meetings every month, including public comments. Important discussions take place after the normal business of the meeting is completed. Residents who take the time to attend meetings often come to present their views on town policies, procedures or plans. They share these with Board members and sometimes solutions to problems are worked out then and there. Dialogues between officials and residents are educational and should be available to those who wish to watch them on NHTV.

Doing these three things—allowing a referendum on revaluation, holding government meetings in the evening, and televising all major Board and Commission meetings (including public comments)—would make possible a wonderful beginning for North Haven's new year and be a splendid gift to the town.

I send best wishes for Happy and Healthy Holidays to all North Haven residents, their families and friends.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

January 1, 2006

(#45)

At the last Board of Selectmen's meeting, my Republican colleagues reaffirmed their determination to plow ahead with revaluation this year. They did this knowing that our new assessments will result in higher residential property taxes and lower commercial/industrial taxes. They did this despite the petition demanding that we take the fully legal option of delaying reval, despite the protest by residents outside our meeting, and despite the fact that reval now is completely unnecessary. Reval now locks in the new residential assessments, determined at the height of the real estate bubble, for the next few years. This is an unnecessary burden on residents.

At the December meeting, I had asked that the newly elected Board of Selectmen go on record regarding delaying reval until next year, but my colleagues wouldn't even allow the issue to be added to the agenda. Clearly, they hoped that this subject will die. But I have news for them, the reval issue isn't going away, and neither am I.

It still isn't too late to stop this unnecessary tax hike; we can join the 38 towns and cities, like Orange and New Haven, that have decided to delay reval. Leaders of those municipalities have said publicly that insisting on reval now is not in the best interests of their residents. But in North Haven, the Republican Selectmen insist that this issue is "dead," saying that the November election was a referendum on delaying reval and that delaying reval lost. They are wrong.

True enough, delaying reval was a campaign issue, but it is also true that my opponent did his best to confuse the issue. And more significantly, our new assessments were not made available until shortly *after* the election. If they really wanted the election to be a referendum on reval, then why weren't the new assessments released before the election?

My campaign was about giving North Haven residents the leadership that they deserve. Because I believe in providing that kind of leadership for North Haven, I will not give up on convincing my colleagues to do what is best for North Haven residents and delay reval.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

January 16, 2006

(#46)

Earlier this month the Board of Selectmen met with the town's Finance Director to begin work on this year's budget. Although the budget process is complex, the principle underlying the budget process is simple--officials predict the cost of town and educational services and that is the amount of money that must be raised from taxes, grants, and other funding sources.

The final budget figures (the ones presented for a vote in May) are determined at the Board of Finance meeting the night after the annual budget hearing which will take place on April 4th. However, if you wish to have real input into the decisions that lead up to that final budget proposal, please do not wait until April to get involved in the process. Attend workshops and meetings; let Town Hall know that you are keeping an eye on the critical choices they are making which result in cuts, full-funding or increases to programs and services. Town Hall's choices tell us a lot about their priorities.

For example, following the NO vote last May, public hours for the pool, library and transfer station were curtailed and funding for bus monitors was eliminated. While Town Hall spoke of these as "cuts chosen by the people" there was no real opportunity for the people to choose what cuts would occur. Clearly, these programs and services were the ones that Town Hall was willing to forgo.

Because Town Hall insists on going through with property revaluation this year, most North Haven residents will see a jump in their tax bill even if the budget does not increase this year and even though the tax rate will go down. The tax rate will go down because the total value of property assessments (the grand list) has increased. Residential property taxes will go up, however, because residential property values increased much more than commercial property values, thus shifting the burden onto residents.

Following approval of the budget, the tax rate will be set. In order to evaluate whether Town Hall has done the best job keeping taxes affordable, look closely at your tax bill, not just at the tax rate (also called the mill rate). The tax/mill rate we are paying now is 32.17 per \$1000 of assessed value. While that rate should be dramatically reduced, your bill will not--and your tax bill tells you how much money will come out of your pocket.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

January 30, 2006

(#47)

Last week, we learned that North Haven's Stop & Shop Distribution Center and the Office Max store are leaving town. One expert estimated that 1500 jobs will be lost from the Stop & Shop move alone if you take into account area restaurants and retailers who will be affected. This is devastating news to all of us, but especially to the individuals who will be put out of work .

How did this happen? It is not too difficult to understand if you look at how Town Hall handles economic development. The administration was completely taken by surprise by last week's announcements. And because they were out of the loop, we are now in a poor position to do anything to prevent the departures.

In the past, Town Hall has made a big deal of "bringing" Big Y, Target, and even Nordstrom to North Haven (we'll have to wait and see if Nordstrom's ever really comes—remember all the false promises of an imminent arrival of a second grocery store to the Waldbaum's site?). But if they want to take credit for those "successes," they must also accept responsibility for their failures. . .and regrettably, the failures are mounting. Although a number of commercial properties have been developed in recent years, during that period the number of empty stores has risen dramatically.

All of this underscores the need to bring Town Hall into the modern age. Most towns that manage economic development well have a professional town planner overseeing their development. Would a professional have gotten wind ahead of time of the planned departure of the Stop & Shop Distribution Center? We'll never know for sure, but information about Stop & Shop consolidating its operations and closing "warehouses" was posted on the corporate website several months ago. Since people working in our town government can't even access the internet from their desks, it is no wonder that no one at Town Hall saw it.

It is time for our town to join the 21st century and reap the benefits of computer technology and professional town planning.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

February 13, 2006

(#48)

My last Selections generated some interesting responses from Town Hall in the form of a memo, issued with the purpose of clarifying my “misstatement” concerning their use of the internet, and a complaint by the First Selectman, who suggested that I blamed Town Hall for the departure of the Stop & Shop distribution center—a false reading of my column. I take both responses to mean that I have struck a nerve.

The memo describes the hardware currently available in Town Hall: how many computers “we” own (161), which proportion are internet enabled (about half), and that “we” have a state of the art fiber optic backbone.

The memo does not, however, identify who makes use of internet access and/or what the computers are used for beyond word processing. The real question is, if internet-enabled computers are available to town administrators, are the operations and procedures in place to take advantage of that technology?

Sadly, the answer to that question is no. The town website is a good example. To its credit, Town Hall has created a website (www.town.north-haven.ct.us) that has some information about the town. Unfortunately, the current version fails to make the best use of the technology to inform, educate, and serve the public. Other towns in our area have websites that allow visitors to email town officials, check their assessments, download application forms, and even pay taxes.

Another example is Town Hall’s failure to provide our Registrars of Voters access to email. The Secretary of State communicates with all towns’ Registrars almost exclusively through email. Currently, when the Secretary of State sends North Haven Registrars email, a town employee from the data center, located in another building, must hand deliver it to the Registrars in Town Hall. This is not efficient use of technology, it’s a waste of resources.

As for the First Selectman’s taking exception to my last Selections, the message in that column was that it’s time to streamline town government so it runs more efficiently. Doing that will save taxpayers’ money. I believe that we should use technology and a professional town planner to help do this. He disagrees; I want to help change his mind.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

February 26, 2006

(#49)

The internet is known as the information superhighway—and with good reason. People who travel there can access a wealth of information with the click of a mouse. Unfortunately, even with the computer-equivalent of a Ferrari, important information about the town of North Haven is largely absent—or at least *was absent*, until recently. The reason for the change is the appearance of a new website: www.northhaveninfo.org.

Sponsored by the Concerned Citizens of North Haven this website contains detailed reports on a wide variety of topics of interest to North Haven residents. The Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, town ordinances and historical information are all available there. The new assessments from the October 1, 2005 revaluation are also listed.

Of particular interest, because we are in “budget season,” are budget-related documents. At this site, visitors can view the proposed budget that the Board of Finance is working on for the upcoming year. This document offers insight into what town officials see as spending priorities. It may change before residents discuss it at the Town Budget Hearing on April 4th (Board of Finance is scheduled to vote on it on March 8th), but if this year is like others in recent memory, the numbers won’t change much.

In past years, Town Hall has made the budget book available only one week before the budget hearing, and then only if you picked it up in person. Now, residents can access it in their homes, at their convenience, well before the Budget Hearing. I applaud the Concerned Citizens of North Haven for making this valuable resource available to our town.

All of the information at northhaveninfo.org should be available through the town’s official website, but isn’t. So, I ask Town Hall: why not take advantage of the internet to provide residents with important information that will help them make informed decisions?

There is no doubt that the adage, “information is power,” is truer today than ever before. Similarly, providing residents with access to information about their local government is giving them power. Certainly, all town officials should strive for that.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

March 27, 2006

(#50)

Good news! Town Hall has added the October 1, 2005 residential and business assessment data to the official town website (<http://www.town.north-haven.ct.us/>).

For years, I have been asking Town Hall to take advantage of computer technology, so it is only fitting that I take time to recognize progress in this area.

By putting the assessment data online, North Haven joins communities across the country whose property owners can now save themselves a trip to the town's Assessor's office when they want the information in these files (and save tax dollars too by freeing staff from having to do the job manually). This is a step in the right direction for the town, but much more should be done.

Other information that should be on the town website includes: the dates of board and commission meetings; the town charter and town ordinances; the code of ethics (which needs to be updated, but that is a story for a future column); minutes of town board and commission meetings; the town annual report (CAFR); land use regulations (planning & zoning and inland wetland); permit applications; and information on matters that are due to be considered at town meetings.

This last item is particularly relevant as we approach the annual budget hearing on April 4th. Currently, most residents who attend the hearing see the document for the first time as they enter the auditorium. Residents who are determined to examine the budget before then must pick it up at Town Hall or the library. But most residents never see the budget document at all. Clearly, putting the budget online would allow more residents to learn how their tax money is being spent.

While Town Hall may not have time to present the budget online before the hearing this year, there certainly is time to put the final proposal online well before voters go to the polls on May 16th.

I applaud Town Hall for adding important assessment information to the official North Haven website. If Town Hall is serious about using the internet to help residents make informed decisions, then it should make sure the budget document is posted online well in advance of the referendum. Let's make 2006 the year that North Haven takes advantage of the power of the internet to serve the public.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

April 10, 2006

(#51)

Thanks to the many residents who took the time to attend last week's annual budget hearing. There were quite a few people there. Many got up and spoke their minds; all spoke from the heart.

Some speakers expressed concern that the budget as proposed, would not provide enough funds to maintain the excellence of our education system. Others worried that Town Hall is not making the best use of our tax dollars, and as a result, there is a decline in the quality of life in town. Still others said they could not support any budget proposal that would increase taxes over and above the exorbitant rise that will result from the October 2005 reval.

At the hearing, town leaders blamed our budget problems on the State. But the State isn't running this town. We need to find ways to become more innovative and efficient; we must do a better job with long-term planning. Rather than laying blame, Town Hall should step-up and accept responsibility for their role in our current situation. After all, who chose to raise residents' taxes rather than to delay revaluation a year? After spending millions to renovate our library, who chose to cut library hours? After spending millions to build a new high school, who chose to eliminate high school teacher and staff positions (as well as positions in every other North Haven school)?

This year's budget (which majority party Board of Finance members approved unchanged the day after the hearing), leaves us no good options. It's bad for town services; it's bad for education, and it's bad for taxpayers. Town Hall's poor decision-making and their failure to plan wisely have led us to where we are today: frustrated and threatened with more budget cuts if this budget is not passed.

Fortunately, there is one step we can take right now to help reduce the tax burden on residents. We can save residents a significant amount of money by "phasing in" the impact of the recent reval, essentially spreading the increase in assessments over three years. I have been working with a group of residents to put this issue on the May 16th ballot so folks can vote on it at the same time as they vote on the budget. Please contact me with questions or concerns regarding this plan. We will need your support in order to provide this much-needed property tax relief to North Haveners.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

April 13, 2006

(#52)

This was sent out as a press release but most papers printed it as Selections #11!

Today marks a turning point for the grassroots effort to allow residents to keep more of their tax dollars. The board of selectmen unanimously approved putting the question of phasing in the October, 2005, assessments to the townspeople on the May 16th ballot. The proposal is to spread the effect of the increase in residential home values over a three year period, which will result in reducing residents' property tax bills.

To illustrate how the phase-in plan would work, Selectwoman Janet McCarty used a hypothetical taxpayer whose new assessment resulted in a \$300 increase in taxes. As it stands now (without any phase-in), the resident would pay that \$300 in each of the next three years for a total of \$900. Under the phase-in proposal, the resident would only pay \$100 this year, \$200 the next, and \$300 the year after that, for a total of \$600 over three years. Phasing-in reval would save that resident \$300. The average homeowner could expect to save even more.

Janet McCarty's supporters spearheaded the effort to delay reval during the campaign for first selectman last fall. At that time, First Selectman Kevin Kopetz acknowledged that going through with reval would cost residents millions of dollars in taxes. He nevertheless blasted McCarty for pushing to delay reval, saying that delaying reval "would not be in the best interest of the town." Now it appears that Mr. Kopetz will support the plan to phase in the effects of the recent reval over a period of three years.

Asked about Mr. Kopetz's change of heart, Ms McCarty said, "I am gratified that Mr. Kopetz has finally seen the light, and has chosen to support our effort to spare residents unnecessary tax hikes. This is especially important this year since Mr. Kopetz is proposing layoffs in education and cuts in town services while at the same time increasing town spending."

At the board of selectmen meeting, several Republican officials called for the question to include an appropriation of \$80,000 to cover the costs of implementing the phase-in. Ms. McCarty strongly opposed this idea, saying that the \$80,000 figure is just not credible. Said McCarty, "They need to do a lot of explaining to show why implementing the phase-in plan would cost more than a nominal amount." Asked whether spending \$80,000 would make the plan too expensive, McCarty said, "Even if

Town Hall holds to the \$80,000 figure, the cost of phasing in would be less than \$10 per household, while the savings for the average resident would be hundreds of dollars.” She added, “The phase-in proposal is a winner for North Haven residents. I am confident that the people will come out to the polls on May 16th and pass this property tax relief plan.”

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

April 30, 2006

(#53)

On May 16th, North Haven residents will go to the polls to vote on two very important questions: (1) the budget proposed by Town Hall for fiscal year 2006-2007 and (2) phase-in of our October 2005 property assessments. I can not support the budget proposal. But I urge voters to vote "yes" on question #2. Phasing in property assessments will reduce the tax burden on residents; it will save residents money.

Many will recall that I joined a hard working trio of gentlemen, Gary Amato, Brian Cummings and Mike Mele in attempting to convince Town Hall to delay implementing reval for a year...but to no avail. We did succeed, however, in getting phase-in on the referendum ballot. As a result, residents, not Town Hall, will decide whether to spread out payment of property tax bills over a three year period which will save residents money.

Phase-in is particularly important because residential taxes have gone up without fail year after year. Which brings me to why I can not support the budget proposed in question #1 on the ballot.

This budget is bad for everyone. It raises taxes while cutting important services. Last year, we were told we could not afford to maintain the hours at the library, pool, and transfer station. Nor were there funds for bus monitors, school staff and administrators. Now we are told we must make severe cuts that will result in teacher layoffs and larger class sizes in the elementary and middle schools. And that's only a partial list.

The choice we are being given between skyrocketing taxes or severe reductions in services, is a false one. Town Hall says it is choosing a middle path, cutting services while raising taxes. But there is a third way: becoming more efficient at delivering the services. The problem is that under the current management, that choice is not being offered. The answer, then, is to change management.

Residents deserve better than perpetual tax hikes and cuts to services. It is time to send Town Hall a message: enough is enough. We can do better!

For more information about how phasing in the new assessments will affect your taxes, come to the rally on the Town Green on Saturday, May 6th from 9 AM to 3 PM.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

May 22, 2006

(#54)

Congratulations and thank you, North Haven voters! Last week, we approved a phase-in plan which will significantly reduce residents' property tax burden.

Community activists have been trying to get our town to implement a plan to delay the effects of reval for a long time. A year ago, I joined their efforts and even made reval a central issue in my campaign for First Selectman. Now all that work has paid off with a whopping 83% voting for the phase-in.

Last summer, my colleagues on the Board of Selectmen could have voted with me to delay reval but refused, even when presented with a petition signed by 1,200 residents. Fortunately, with phase-in, the people vote directly on the phase-in plan rather than just the Selectmen, and the people decided a resounding YES!

To his credit, the First Selectman eventually came around and backed the phase-in property tax relief plan, but not without first putting up roadblocks. Town officials asserted that phase-in would cost \$80,000 to implement and called it a "bureaucratic nightmare." But in the end, when it became clear that public support for the plan was overwhelming, they dropped all opposition.

Last week the town budget also passed, though by a much narrower margin. Like Town Hall's budgets of the past few years, this one imposes serious cuts to education and town services, while at the same time, necessitating a tax increase. Therefore, I cannot celebrate approval of this budget.

I believe town leaders have an obligation to find a way to reducing our tax burden while making town government more modern and efficient. That is why I have pursued the reval issue so doggedly: to find ways of relieving the tax burden while still providing important services.

The results of the referendum suggest that the phase-in option helped those who may have voted against the budget to vote for it, since they knew that they would get a tax break. That's the kind of choice North Haven residents deserve.

The Disappearing \$80,000 Price Tag

June 4, 2006

(#55)

The overwhelming vote to approve revaluation phase-in was accompanied by a second important victory for North Haven taxpayers: the absence of an \$80,000 appropriation to implement the plan. That was the amount that administration officials wanted to be included on the phase-in question. Fortunately, the \$80,000 price tag mysteriously disappeared, and phase-in has been implemented without the Board of Finance seeking special funds to pay for it.

The story of this \$80,000 illustrates an important point: that government works best when it is held accountable for its decisions, and the best way to accomplish that is for citizens to ask tough questions.

Rewind to April. Three activists brought a petition to the Town Clerk for certification with the intention of pressing the Board of Selectmen to add phase-in to the May 16th referendum. My colleagues on the Board expressed their view that the phase-in question should include an appropriation of \$80,000 to cover the cost of implementation. I insisted that phase-in should not require any new appropriations.

In his May 2nd column, Mr. Kopetz asserted that “the \$80,000 is not a speculative amount,” rather that the amount was based on “independent research” (carried out by our town attorney and by our finance director) on towns that had already implemented phase-in. He added that the, “vast majority of these towns do not recommend phase-in as it can be an administrative nightmare.”

Many residents were skeptical. At the town meeting, one resident insisted on questioning the town attorney and finance director about their research. Both men refused to say where they had gotten their information, claiming their conversations were confidential. This made it impossible to verify their research and it now seems that the research was flawed: at the May Board of Finance meeting, the finance director announced that phase-in implementation is done.

This story highlights why it is important to ask tough questions of town officials. I believe town officials, myself included, should be held accountable for the positions we take and decisions we make. Respectful questioning of elected officials is one way to ensure government decisions are truly for the common good.

The Upjohn Site: unhealthy, unresolved & upsetting

June 19, 2006

(#56)

Recently, the town of North Haven granted Pfizer Pharmaceuticals Inc. a permit to fill-in a fire pond on the Upjohn site. Located on the western shore of the Quinnipiac River just south of the Route 40 connector, this site was contaminated by manufacturing operations that took place there until the 1990's. I believe the Inland-Wetlands and the Planning & Zoning Commissions were right to approve the permit because the proposal will reduce the flow of contaminants into the Quinnipiac River. Nevertheless, like many residents in town (including the many who attended the public hearings), I am discouraged that North Haveners are still battling to guarantee safe and effective decontamination of this site.

To be sure, there has been some progress toward decontamination, thanks to the efforts of the Concerned Citizens for the Environment, our Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) and many others.

In 1994, the town of North Haven and Upjohn, then the owner of the site, settled a lawsuit brought by North Haven's P&Z regarding a sludge pile that violated zoning regulations. That agreement called for Upjohn to pay millions of dollars to the town for the violation, but capped the amount at \$15 million, even if the sludge pile was never removed. One result of that settlement is that the town must now rely on the federal Environmental Protection Agency and Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection to enforce the clean-up.

Since then, the site has changed owners twice, from Upjohn to Pharmacia to Pfizer, and while Pfizer has been working to evaluate the contamination and to generate a comprehensive clean-up plan, their legal responsibility ends with satisfying state and federal agencies.

So, what did we get for our \$15 million? The money went directly into the town revenues and was never set aside for environmental clean-up. At this point, it appears that the \$15 million bought us a sludge pile. Right now, it seems our only recourse is to pressure the government agencies to compel Pfizer to clean-up their mess using state-of-the-art remediation methods.

In 1994, town officials may have thought that accepting \$15 million for a sludge pile was a sweet deal; twelve years later, most of the site is still unsuitable for human activity. We must continue to press Pfizer and government agencies to do right by North Haven and remediate the site to the fullest extent possible.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

July 11, 2006

(#57)

A MAP for the Future of North Haven

After last week's storm, folks ventured out of their homes to walk dogs, investigate the nearby lightning strike and visit with neighbors. Many of us spoke of how lucky we are to live here - in America and in North Haven.

Folks also shared concerns about the costs of owning a home in town, since they had just received their new property tax bills. They expressed gratitude for our phase-in plan, but also questioned what town government is doing to reduce expenses as a way to lower property taxes.

Certainly, we are fighting for property tax relief in whatever form it may take: economic development, state/ federal revenue and private grant funds. However, we also need to find a way to economize and become more efficient. If we spend less money we will need less money from taxpayers.

Without a doubt, our fine town employees work hard for us, but just working hard is not going to solve this problem. I believe we need a plan, a M.A.P. if you will—not a roadmap, but a Management and Accountability Plan.

The MAP would serve two important functions: (1) to define objectives and provide accountability, and (2) to allow residents to understand where their tax money goes. Both these functions will be critical as we work to limit spending and hold the line on taxes while maintaining services.

The MAP would be a framework in which citizens, and the town employees who serve them, set measurable goals. It would provide Department Heads with guidelines so they can prepare a prioritized, efficient, results-based plan for their department, and it would clearly establish objectives on which to base salary increases.

Creating a MAP for North Haven town government is about good government. It will cost us nothing and will save us money. Importantly, it will make the workings of government more transparent, and it will present residents with an opportunity to help us set priorities.

I will discuss these ideas with town officials. Working together, we can successfully develop a MAP for North Haven that will lead to increased efficiency, improved accountability and substantial cost-savings for our town government.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

July 31, 2006

(#58)

Fixing the Bidding Process

People have asked me how this administration could do a better job managing town government. One way would be to put contracts out to bid to ensure that taxpayers are getting the best value for their hard-earned tax dollars.

For many years, Master Custodial has enjoyed no-bid contracts to provide the school system's janitorial services. Last year, the value of the contract was \$378,000. This year the proposed price-tag was \$408,000 – up \$30,000. Breaking a twenty-year tradition, the Board of Education put the custodial contract out to bid, and settled on a price of \$252,000. The winner of the bid? None other than Master Custodial, the original company!

If you're having trouble understanding why the same vendor who had asked for \$408,000 won the contract with a final bid \$156,000 less than their original price, you're not alone. Remarkably, the majority on the Board of Education saw nothing irregular about this, and voted to renew Master Custodial's contract. But what about the money that Master Custodial has been overcharging over the years?

Although the Board of Education declined comment, Town Hall's explanation, as reported in The North Haven Citizen, is that the difference between what Master Custodial charged us last year and its "winning" bid this year is due to the fact that the contract has been reworked. Under the new deal, all emergency work that is to be performed will require additional costs.

Are we really to understand that the schools have \$156,000 of "emergency" custodial work? Are we to believe that 38% of Master Custodial's original contract price was for emergencies? Were the other companies who bid for the job told about the \$156,000 worth of potential "emergencies?"

Best management practices require drawing-up a contract with a reasonable estimate of what services will be required, then putting that contract out to bid in a fair and open process. Evidently, in the case of this custodial contract, those practices have not been employed, and believe it or not, Master Custodial also holds a no-bid contract for our town buildings! We need to fix this broken bidding process. It's time for a proactive North Haven management and accountability plan.

SELECTIONS

By Selectwoman Janet McCarty

September 12, 2006

(#59)

The Indian Ridge Development: Too Much of a Good Thing

CMB Capital Appreciation, LLC, is seeking to build Indian Ridge, an age-restricted residential community, on land off Half Mile Road between Middletown Avenue and Benedict Drive. The proposed development includes 105 units that would qualify for housing assistance and 245 units that would be sold at market value. I oppose Indian Ridge, as presented, because it is too large for that area of town.

The Indian Ridge project presented to our Inland Wetland and Planning and Zoning Commissions, is unsuitable for the single-family-home neighborhood in which it would be located. The plan calls for three four-storey residential buildings which would require more than 850 parking places. All those cars would proceed in and out of the development via one driveway on Half Mile Road which would mean that the traffic on area roads would be increased dramatically. Also, to accommodate the water runoff from all of the impervious surfaces in the development, five detention ponds would need to be constructed (and eventually maintained by the condominium association). Clearly, a project of this magnitude will have a significant impact on our town in many ways.

However, I believe that North Haven could benefit were Indian Ridge built near the center of town, where proper infrastructure for such a huge development is already in place. Alternately, a modified version of the Indian Ridge project, one with a better fit for the Half Mile Road neighborhood, could also work. I hope that CMB Capital Appreciation, LLC considers these options.

Based on the turnout and comments by residents at the Commission and information meetings regarding Indian Ridge, there is considerable community opposition to the project in its present form. However, the town may not be able to put a halt to the Indian Ridge development because a state law passed in 1989 allows developers to bypass many local zoning regulations, if that town has not met the state's

“affordable” housing 10% requirement. Presently, only 4.9% of North Haven’s housing qualifies as affordable.

This situation points out the urgent need for North Haven to address its shortage of housing that is affordable (especially for seniors), an issue I have championed for many years. The escalating cost of living in North Haven is pricing many long-time residents out of our community. Failure to address this need will have a second ominous consequence: we will continue to be at risk for having forced upon us inappropriate developments like Indian Ridge.

“Senior Tax Freeze”

October 3, 2006
(#60)

The property tax burden on residents has been steadily increasing over the past seven years, and it is guaranteed to increase over the next two years as revaluation phase-in is implemented. There are two major forces driving up the residential tax bill: (1) increased spending and (2) increased residential property assessments (relative to commercial assessments).

I have already made proposals to reduce spending by reducing waste (for example, by putting contracts out to bid), and along with town activists, led the movement to ease the impact of increased residential assessments via phase-in. Nevertheless, the tax bill remains burdensome for those with limited resources, particularly for seniors on fixed incomes.

I believe we need to do more to help these residents. North Haven has a tradition of protecting those in need. We have been a leader in ensuring that our children are safe by outlawing bullying and by insisting that schools have excellent indoor air quality. North Haven also implemented a modest senior tax relief program, to help seniors in need. This program provides \$300 of tax relief, which, in 2002 when it was implemented, provided a modest, but significant level of assistance. But now we must do more.

Fortunately, the State recently passed a law allowing the town to do just that, provide seniors with more tax relief. The new law allows towns to help qualifying seniors by “freezing” their tax bill at current level. The “freeze” puts a ceiling on the tax bill: the tax bill can not go up as long as the person qualifies, but it can go down if the town lowers taxes.

I promise to work to implement this tax freeze. The State has required that the minimum age for eligibility is 70 years old, but the asset limits can be set by the town. Unfortunately, the State declined to reimburse towns for providing this assistance to seniors in need. However, it is clear to me that North Haven can afford to implement some or all of this program, especially if we reduce wasteful management practices.

I am hopeful that in the near future, I can engage my colleagues on the Board of Selectmen to hammer out the details of a workable “senior tax freeze” plan.

Volunteers: The Heart of Our Town

October 15, 2006
(#61)

Over the past months, the town has been processing an application by CMB Capital Appreciation, LLC for the Indian Ridge active adult community development. To date, the plans for this project have been the focal point of four Inland Wetlands Commission (IWC), two Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) and two Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) meetings. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of all those who represent us in evaluating this complex application.

North Haven relies on paid professionals who administer and evaluate applications like Indian Ridge; their work is essential, and I thank them for it. But I would especially like to recognize the volunteers who make up the IWC, P&Z and the WPCA; they have donated hours and hours and hours of their time, often with little recognition.

The Indian Ridge proposal has been the talk of the town. The developer proposes building three four-story buildings in a single-family residential area off of Half Mile Road. The development would contain 350 units, of which 105 would qualify as affordable housing.

The many experts representing CMB Capital Appreciation have submitted mountains of documents to support their application. Experts who work for the town, and specialists hired by the town to consult on this project have worked hard to evaluate this data and to measure the impact that Indian Ridge would have on the town's resources, environment and surroundings. Commissioners and town employees have done their best to weigh the complicated, arcane and sometimes contentious expert testimony.

Decisions on land use and zoning affect our quality of life and the future of our community. It is little wonder, then, that the public hearings for the Indian Ridge proposal have drawn a crowd, many of whom have had to sit through hours of official testimony before they were allowed to speak. Our community also owes a debt of gratitude to these residents for taking the time to educate themselves about the project, to question the applicant, and to voice their concerns.

North Haven's government would not function were it not for the efforts of the many volunteers who serve the town. I thank them for their important work and for their commitment to public service.

PLEASE VOTE ON NOVEMBER 7Th

October 30, 2006
(#62)

Voting lies at the foundation of our democracy; it is the principal way we exercise our right to self-determination. With election day fast approaching, I would like to encourage everyone who is eligible, to exercise this fundamental right by going to the polls to vote.

This has been a contentious election season. Snail and email boxes burst with political pamphlets, requests for money and unsolicited letters from “celebrities” who want us to support their candidates. Campaign ads fill the TV screen day and night – they follow one after another after another so that (with the sound muted) it’s nearly impossible to tell when the ad for one candidate ends and the one for his/her opponent begins (listening, you know it’s over when you hear, “...and I approve this message.”).

Like many North Haven residents, I have grown weary of the endless parade of sound bites and negative ads that amount to the marketing of candidates the way companies market their products. Marketing costs money—lots of it—and plenty of money has gone into candidates’ coffers. To run a competitive campaign, candidates must raise formidable sums, which makes them beholden to big money donors. I believe these practices contribute to the sad fact that nationwide, barely half of those eligible to vote actually do so. My point here is not to rail against the flaws in our democracy, but rather to encourage everyone to participate in our democracy despite the flaws. Let’s ignore the hype and discover who would truly best represent us and our interests. Should we continue in the direction our leaders are taking us, or is it time for a change? Who stands with us on these “hot button” issues: the war in Iraq, health care, tax fairness, jobs and the economy, the environment—just to name a few.

On November 7th, when making your choices, please consider these criteria too: if elected, will he/she work to improve the lives of their constituents; will they fight to get more funding for North Haven from federal and state sources; are they committed to ending the state’s foolish policy of funding public education on the backs of property taxpayers; is protecting the environment a major concern for the candidate; and are you

convinced that their priorities mesh with your own. In other words, think locally when you vote!

Please, demonstrate your commitment to our country and to the future, please vote on November 7th

SMART DEVELOPMENT (Part 1)

November 19, 2006
(#63)

Currently, the Planning and Zoning Commission is soliciting input from experts and residents as it works to update the town's zoning regulations. These rules have been in the news lately thanks to the Indian Ridge development, which has sparked controversy because of its enormous size. Regardless of whether or not the controversial Indian Ridge plan gains approval, it has highlighted the importance of our town zoning regulations.

In order to answer the question, "What kind of zoning regulations do we want?" we must first answer the question, "What do we want North Haven to look like in the future?" Because of our many resources—location, accessibility, good schools, to name a few—developers see North Haven as a desirable town in which to "build." All along the Quinnipiac River, there is pressure to develop the few commercial and industrial properties that are left. This pressure could lead to unfettered development—unless we act now to manage it.

Don't get me wrong. I think development is good for the town—as long as it is done properly. Done properly, development can reduce the tax burden, and can enhance the livability of our town. But it needs to be managed in a way that respects the rights of property owners while guarding public welfare. We need development that is good for North Haven, that benefits residents and businesses, that respects the environment, and that maintains or improves the character of our town. So how do we accomplish good development?

There are four basic steps. We need: (1) a common vision of what our town should look like; (2) a plan for achieving that vision; (3) regulations to execute the plan; and (4) meaningful enforcement to make sure the regulations are followed.

Recently we have taken some promising steps. Last year the Town Plan of Conservation and Development got a much needed update after 18 years. And this year, we are updating our Planning and Zoning regulations. But much more needs to be done.

SMART DEVELOPMENT (Part 2)

December 4, 2006
(#64)

My last column dealt with the steps we should take to ensure North Haven's future "smart" development: (1) a common vision of what our town should look like; (2) a plan for achieving that vision; (3) regulations to execute the plan; and (4) meaningful enforcement to make sure the regulations are followed. Our recently updated Plan of Development and the ongoing review of Planning & Zoning regulations are a good start. But a fabulous plan with fantastic regulations won't get the job done unless there is meaningful enforcement to make sure the regulations are followed.

How seriously does North Haven view enforcement? Judging by the town resources dedicated to the task, not very. North Haven has one part-time zoning enforcement officer charged with enforcing both Zoning and Inland Wetland regulations; that's huge responsibility.

How seriously do developers take our regulations? Some ignore the rules and get away with it because they can. Case in point, Jordan Properties, which built an antique-car storage facility at the junction of the Muddy and Quinnipiac Rivers and "opened for business" without obtaining the required Certificate of Occupancy, a blatant violation of town regulations. And this was not their first violation - construction of the building began before a building permit was issued. It appears that there have been no real consequences for Jordan Properties' actions.

Normally, a Certificate of Occupancy is not difficult to obtain once all of the conditions of the permits are satisfied. Jordan Properties has met all but one of theirs, which involves a small piece of land that was promised to the Town for use as a public canoe launch. The land was promised as part of the permit to erect a car storage facility in such an environmentally sensitive area. The problem is that the would-be canoe launch is contaminated with hazardous materials, and the town has rightfully refused to accept ownership.

How did Jordan Properties address this problem? By negotiating a change in the deal, such as sharing the cost of clean-up? No, they simply occupied the building and opened for business.

It is the Town's duty to stand for the public interest. I hope that Town Hall fulfills its contract with the public by insisting that Jordan Properties fulfills its contractual obligations

Joy to the World

December 17, 2006

(#65)

Greetings, North Haven. I send you best wishes for a healthy, happy and safe holiday season.

This is the time of year when people of varied religious and cultural backgrounds make a concerted effort to gather with family and friends. It's also a time when charitable contributions peak, volunteerism abounds, and many discover or rediscover the joy of giving.

But it is good to remember that this is also a stressful time of year for many folks. We are often too busy decorating, writing cards, shopping, attending parties, cooking and wrapping gifts to appreciate that the opportunity to sit and visit with family and friends is itself a remarkable gift that should be savored. That's why I love spending time with young children during the holidays. It is such a treat - they aren't stressed, they still see and feel the wonder of it all. If you are one of the harried people, please stop and ask a child what they love about this time of year. Listen with your heart (and then cross two or three things off your "to do" list).

There are also too many folks whose loneliness and need overshadow any joy of the season. If you are one of these people, please ask for help. Call Town Hall, they will refer you to religious, social and town groups who have much to offer. If you know of someone in need, perhaps you can make the call for them.

My favorite thing about the holiday season is that it is a time when people look for ways to make the world a better place. That may sound like a daunting task, but we can make a start by working with our families in our community and North Haven has a very good start.

My hope for 2007 is not revolutionary – I wish for Peace on Earth! And I hope that all of your wishes come true.

North Haven's New Year

January 1, 2007

(#66)

Traditionally, this is the time when we make a list of goals we hope to realize in the new year. Below is a list of issues and actions that I would like addressed and resolved by town government - these are my resolutions for North Haven's New Year.

Property Taxes: This year the second installment of our revaluation phase-in will be included in our tax bills. The phase-in will cause a tax increase for most residents, and will present a hardship for some, especially those on fixed incomes. I resolve to work for local property tax reform; a good first step would be a tax freeze for qualified senior citizens. I expect that the Board of Selectmen will take-up this issue at our January 11th meeting, so please call me, Town Hall and/or come to the Selectmen's meeting if you want to be heard on this issue.

Budget: Town Hall has made up its proposed budget for 2007-2008. Unfortunately, the proposal is a repeat of past mistakes, and it obscures rather than enlightens. We need to change how our government does business. I resolve to do my best to present residents a budget that accurately reflects the cost of town government. I will also work hard to: ensure that large contracts that should go out to bid, actually do go out to bid; keep the public informed about all aspects of town government; restore the library and pool hours; and insist that government expenses are managed in the most cost-efficient manner.

Economic Development and the Environment: We presently do not have a town engineer (we are paying a consultant to do the job of an engineer). This arrangement is not in the best interest of residents or the environment. We need an expert whose first priority is what's best for North Haven because he/she works for the people of North Haven. We need experts in planning who will work to protect our environment while fostering smart economic development. I resolve to work hard to ensure that such a person is hired to replace our former town engineer.

There are many challenges facing us in the coming year. I resolve to work with Town Hall to continue to provide the best services we can to you.

Good Times at The Safe Harbor Cafe

January 15, 2007
#(67)

In the world of government, it seems that more and more we are told we must choose between accepting reduced services or increased costs (read increased taxes). The challenge of good government is to recognize that this is often a false choice, and that by working smarter, we can do a better job at reduced cost. A case in point is what has happened with the life skills (special ed) programs at the North Haven Middle and High Schools.

For many years, the life skills program at the NHMS has been headed-up by the tireless and loving teacher, Dot Logan. Her focus has been to educate the children about the kinds of jobs that may be available to them when they enter the work force and to teach them the practical skills necessary for holding such a job.

Although the Middle School program was a huge success, there was no comparable program at the High School because the facilities were not adequate. As a result, North Haven would pay for others to educate many of our special ed high school children. That changed with the opening of the new NHHS, because the Board of Education determined that there should and would be a similar program there. Now we know that that move has saved money for our town.

Several years ago, I wrote about Ms. Logan because I was impressed by her competence and dedication when she designed, developed, and opened, "The NHMS Popcorn Palace," a business which had the children taking orders for, then preparing, and delivering snacks and drinks for special events at the school. This past November, Dot and her kids outdid themselves by opening, "The Safe Harbor Cafe." This restaurant is managed by both the NHMS and NHHS special ed children (and by the gifted staff from both schools). The high school students bake the desserts (yummy) for the Cafe and run their business, "Sweet Sailings" under the watchful eye of another exceptional teacher, Nancy Tingley. The central idea in both of these program is to replicate a work environment in the classroom: to teach responsibility, good manners, hygiene and the basic skills necessary to take and follow directions customers.

Like the Middle School program, the High School program is a huge success. The children take pride in the skills they are learning, look forward to living independently and the program saves taxpayers' money. Now that's what I call good government.

Clean Energy: Let's Just Do It!

January 22, 2007

#(68)

Energy is a very “hot” topic these days for many reasons – the Iraq war, the spike in oil prices, global warming, the proposed Broadwater LNG platform, and the recent exorbitant price increases for electricity. Our dependence on energy not only makes us vulnerable to interruptions in supply (and subject to price spikes), it also contributes to the degradation of our environment through increased air, water, and land pollution.

Solving our energy problems will undoubtedly involve a multi-faceted approach, including reducing energy demand through improved efficiency and conservation, as well as increasing our use of renewable, clean energy that neither depletes our natural resources nor pollutes the environment. These may sound like strategies that could only be implemented at the state or federal level, but I believe individuals and communities must work together to begin to tackle these problem. As a start, I will propose a resolution at our next Board of Selectmen meeting to set North Haven on the path to become a Connecticut Clean Energy Community (CCEC).

To become a CCEC our town government must pass a municipal clean energy resolution which commits the town to purchase 20% of its energy (electricity) from renewable sources by 2010 (not all at once, phased-in over the next few years). If we do this soon, we will be eligible for a \$5000 grant that can be used to educate and promote clean energy. In addition, once we become a CCEC, we will be given two installed solar panels every time 100 residential or business customers choose the CT Clean Energy Option on their UI electric bill (see the insert in your monthly bill for more details). The more individuals who join, the more free solar panels we get. Eventually, we could be generating enough solar power to reduce the Town's electric bills.

State Representative Steve Fontana, I\$FIT (a local advocacy group which seeks to bring increased state aid to North Haven) and our Conservation Commission all support the resolution; what is more, most of our neighboring towns are CCECs.

North Haven residents have a proud record of acting to safeguard the environment. Now is the time for our town to step-up for clean energy. Let's just do it!

I Vote We Vote By Referendum

February 15, 2007
#(69)

Today, the Board of Selectmen finalized the agenda for a Special Town Meeting to be held on March 13th. Included in the list of items for consideration and approval will be the purchase of: an Emergency Response Vehicle, a payload, a boiler for Green Acres School and a recording system for the Town Clerk's office (\$385,000 total – the money would come from our unappropriated fund balance). In order for these proposals to be authorized, they must be approved by the legislative body, which in our form of government, is the Town Meeting.

To some, the cost of the proposals discussed here may seem inconsequential when compared to the annual budget of \$70 million, but to me they are not. I believe that these expenditures should be discussed at a Town Meeting but, along with all of the other budget items, voted on in a referendum.

In 2003, to his credit, the First Selectmen instituted a policy for budget votes to be taken by referendum. I have supported this policy, but it should cover all expenditures that require legislative body approval. Why? Because more people vote at the polls than they do at Town Meetings. The numbers say it all: when the annual budget goes to referendum, over 1,000 residents vote. At annual Town Meetings in which we voted on the budget, voter participation is less than a quarter of that seen at referenda.

I favor having Town Meetings vote on administrative issues, policies, and/or procedures, for example the revamped Noise Ordinance. I also support the idea of holding occasional Town Meetings for the purpose of public discussions of important topical issues. Such gatherings would lead to a more informed public, both on the matters discussed but also on Town officials' positions on those matters. I do not, however, favor voting at a town meeting on proposals that will cost taxpayers' money. For that, we should vote via referendum.

Therefore, I respectfully requested that the capital purchases be removed from the call of the Special Town Meeting and, like last year's phase-in of revaluation, be voted on with the budget in May.

MARCH MADNESS

February 26, 2007

#(70)

The budget season is here which means that town officials and employees are busy attending workshops, meetings and planning sessions. February has been action-packed and it looks like March will be hectic too.

Last week, the Board of Selectmen voted to call for a March 13th Special Town Meeting (STM). I did not sign that call because I believe that major expenditures should be considered when we vote by referendum on the annual budget, not in a rush because we have extra money in the bank (our bloated unappropriated fund balance). Spending on special items should occur when there is truly an emergency.

There are seven proposals on the agenda for the March STM, four deal with purchases that together will cost \$385,000 (#3 through #6). These items are a payloader, an Emergency Rescue Vehicle, a recording system for the Town Clerk's office, and a new boiler for Green Acres School. Of these, only the boiler is arguably a true emergency, because we must heat the school. The other three, however, can wait two months and be considered when the town focuses on the annual budget.

There are three other proposals on the STM. I fully support item #1, which will allow the town to both recoup \$400,000 in back taxes on the State Street "tire pond" but also facilitate the pond's remediation (the tires pose a serious environmental risk). Item #2 is a proposed Noise Ordinance that meets DEP standards--the one we have had on the books for 15 years has not been legally enforceable. The new Ordinance has a fatal flaw: it entrusts the granting of variances to the Board of Selectmen. Variances should be handled by land use commissions, with a support staff of experts. Item #7 is an amendment to the Ordinance providing tax relief for the elderly and permanently disabled. It is good as far as it goes, but we can and must do more for our most vulnerable residents.

I urge residents to attend and ask questions at the STM. There will be experts there to help. Also, don't miss the Board of Finance meeting the next night. There they will finalize the budget presented to the town at the April budget hearing. In the meantime, I am always available for questions or comments at: 239-1913 or janet.mccarty@usa.net.

On a happy note, North Haven is now a Connecticut Clean Energy Community, because the Board of Selectmen unanimously approved a resolution which commits the town to the goal of having 20% of its energy purchases come from clean energy sources

by 2010. Passing this resolution makes our town eligible for a \$5000 grant and free solar panels. The success of this program depends on energy consumers' participation, so please remember to check the "clean energy" option on your electric bill. Special thanks go to Mr. Kopetz and Mr. Mitchell for approving the CCEC resolution and to the Conservation Commission and I\$FIT for their initiative and support.

Restoring Power to the People

February 26, 2007

#(70)

In towns like North Haven, with a town meeting form of government, the state has been taking away decision-making power from the Town Meetings and giving it to the Board of Selectmen. This unfortunate policy has effectively increased the clout of the Board of Selectmen and reduced the central authority of the Town Meeting (the people). Fortunately, legislation has been introduced (HB7321) that will right this wrong and begin to restore the checks and balances which are at the foundation of our democratic government.

I first became aware of this misguided policy when North Haven was wrestling with revaluation. When delaying reval was proposed in 2005, the Board of Selectmen voted to implemented reval without delay, over the objections of twelve hundred residents who had petitioned to delay. In this case, the Board of Selectmen had the statutory authority to ignore the petitioners. The state had removed the power to implement delaying reval from the legislative body of towns with town meeting forms of government. For those towns, and only those towns, the power was given to the Board of Selectmen (the executive body of the town).

Contrast that outcome with the proposal for phasing-in reval, which was successfully adopted. The statute for phase-in gave the decision-making authority to the legislative body of all towns, including those with town meetings. In North Haven, at the referendum in May 2006, an overwhelming majority (83%) of residents voted to phase-in reval.

If you are confused about why voters were allowed to decide about phasing-in but not about delaying reval, you are not alone. The state statues are now arbitrary and inconsistent. I feel so strongly about this that I traveled to Hartford last week to testify in favor of HB7321 at a public hearing before the state's Planning and Development Committee. HB7321 restores the power to the town meeting in 13 statutes that cover a wide variety of matters such as delaying reval and abating property taxes.

In order for North Haven's local government to function properly, we need to maintain the balance between the executive and legislative branches. Passage of HB7321 will help re-establish that balance by restoring power where it belongs—in the hands of the people.

Speak Your Piece at Annual Budget Hearing

March 25, 2007

#(71)

Our annual budget hearing will take place on April 4th. The good news for North Haven is that our Finance Director agreed to my request to place the budget proposal on the town's website (<http://www.town.north-haven.ct.us>). The bad news is that the proposal calls for another tax increase and more cuts in services. The budget hearing is your chance to ask questions about spending priorities.

Posting the budget on the town's website is an important win for the public. For years most public documents could only be obtained by going in person to Town Hall. Now, at least some important documents can be viewed on the internet. Since I first became involved in our community, I have worked to improve the openness of town government. I applaud the administration for taking this important step. We need to go further by putting online additional public documents such as referenda ballot questions and meeting agenda and minutes.

There is no doubt that our budget document is detailed and complex, but please take advantage of the opportunity to examine it. If you believe there are items in the proposed budget that should be changed, come to the hearing and share your concerns. Certainly, there are many items which concern me. For example, money to pay for raises for Department Heads is included, but the proposal would not restore hours to the pool, library or transfer station, nor would it provide the funds to rehire bus monitors to safeguard our school children. In order to include these important services in next year's budget, Town Hall does not need to further increase the bottom line, they need to set good priorities.

Your vote counts! At the March 14th Town Meeting, voters rejected Town Hall's ill-conceived plan to purchase an inadequate Emergency Response Vehicle for the Fire Department. The next day, the Board of Finance reversed itself, and voted for the appropriate vehicle (stay tuned for the date of that Town Meeting!).

The budget hearing is the last opportunity for the public to affect the budget before it goes to referendum on May 22nd so please join me and your neighbors at the hearing on April 4th at 7 PM in the High School auditorium.

Raises for All Department Heads? No way!

April 11, 2007

Last week, the Board of Finance approved the final version of the budget which will go before voters at the May 22nd referendum. In past years, the budget document has included many erroneous projections and meaningless line items; this year is no different. But what makes this budget proposal truly unacceptable is that it includes pay raises for all Department Heads, including the two who were arrested for allegedly embezzling funds and interfering with an investigation.

To be fair, there are bright spots in this budget. This proposal rescinds the arbitrary cuts that the Board of Finance made to the library and pool almost two years ago. Town Hall says that they are now restoring those hours in response to the many residents who protested the cuts at the budget hearing. What they did not reveal is that in the past two years, they have repeatedly ignored two petitions from residents to extend pool hours, an unprecedented (and impassioned) letter from the Library Board to restore the library hours, and the persistent requests from Democrats to do both. Their change of philosophy was nothing more than a political move to appease voters during a turbulent time.

Worse, the Board chose to use money from the unappropriated surplus to finance this political move. This approach jeopardizes the funding of the library and pool in future years, since the funds they plan to use this year may not be available next year. The Board of Finance should have found money from elsewhere within the operating budget, as is dictated by sound management practices.

Where could they have found that money? I wrote to the Board of Finance detailing three different ways that it could be done. One way would be to withdraw the proposed increases in the salaries of the two Department Heads who were arrested last week. While people can differ on the propriety of the First Selectman voting himself a raise, I can fathom no argument about the propriety of giving raise to officials, who have been placed on leave because they are suspected of criminal conduct. That is beyond the pale.

The people of North Haven deserve and expect to be presented with a smart, honest budget – not one that contains foolish raises and incorporates poor financial practices. I can not support this irresponsible proposal.