

4/3/03 - (2)

Don Johnson

From: Trey Shupert
Sent: Wednesday, April 02, 2003 11:10 AM
To: Board of Selectmen; Don Johnson; John Murray
Subject: Senior Citizen Tax Exemption

Congratulations to the Board on successful passage of the Override.

As much as I realized that it was vital we pass this operating override, and as hard as we all worked on it's passage, I must admit that I am concerned about the impact the increase will have on families struggling under with the conditions of the current economy. Throughout the campaign, I received phone calls from non-members of ACTS who said that as much as they wanted good schools and good municipal services, they just could not afford this tax increase. A few even got very emotional in sharing with me their personal financial situations.

Acton is a great place to live, however, this tax increase will be significant for many property owners. It will require all of us to make choices and personal sacrifices, especially in an economic downturn. Property taxes are extremely regressive and impact retired senior citizens (and those on fixed incomes), more than those of us still working.

While I recognize that Acton has implemented several tax relief programs for senior citizens, few seniors take advantage of current programs. For some it's a matter of pride. For others it's a fear that their neighbors will find out their financial condition. And for others it's just a lack of knowledge that programs exist. Whatever the reason(s) for under-utilization of existing relief programs, I firmly believe that our senior citizen population makes Acton a better community. Despite the sensationalized accounts by opponents of the override that seniors will leave in droves if the override passes, I do believe that some will have to leave Acton and that we must do more to enable all seniors to remain in their homes.

I shared my concerns with Peter Ashton, in his capacity as the Selectmen's representative to the senior tax relief committee. As a result of my discussions with him, as well as with Don Johnson, I think it is time that we, as a Board, seriously investigate the feasibility of enacting home rule legislation to implement a property tax exemption program for seniors. The State and some communities have already done groundwork on this so we will not be starting from scratch. For example, in last weekend's selectmen's package, there was a copy of a Sudbury warrant article that will be considered by voters this spring. Sudbury has already had their home

rule
petition approved by the legislature and the proposed warrant article,
if
approved, will give senior citizens, at least 60 yrs. old, a 50%
exemption
from their property taxes.

Accordingly, I want to give the Board notice that I have asked the Town
Manager to add this to our agenda for our Board Meeting prior to the
start
of Monday night's TM. Specifically, with the Board's support, I hope to
announce, as part of my budget presentation to TM, that the Board will
form
a special committee (made up of representatives of the current Senior
Tax
Relief Committee, representative(s) from the Finance Committee,
Assessors,
Town Staff and other interested citizens) to investigate current
legislation on senior tax exemptions enacted in other communities and to
develop a similar tax exemption program for Acton. Since the senior tax
relief committee has already done good work on this, I hope to be able
to
leverage their knowledge and findings in order to develop the relevant
home
rule petition and associated bylaw(s) in time for consideration at any
fall
town meeting that we have, and no later than the April 2004 ATM.

As this is advanced notice for the Board, and not intended to generate
email
discussion that could be in violation of the open meeting law, I request
that you give some thought to the proposal for our discussion on Monday
night.

Regards,
Trey