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## Selectman urges override options

By **Katie Liesener**/ Staff Writer  
Thursday, February 16, 2006

For years, Wayland residents have looked at an override ballot that requests a yes-or-no vote on a single override amount.

But Selectman Alan Reiss encouraged the rest of his board Tuesday night to consider two other options that could give voters greater choice over how much their property tax should or should not increase - the pyramid override question and the menu override question.

In the "pyramid" approach, voters are presented with multiple proposed funding levels for the town's budget. The highest money level that garners the most "yes" votes then becomes the winning override amount.

The other option is the "menu" approach. In this type of ballot question, the proposed override amount is broken down into funding for different programs. Voters then vote individually for each part of the override, and the parts that receive a majority of yes votes are added together to create the total passed override amount. It is essentially a line-item veto.

"It's the voters' money and they know best how to spend their own money," Reiss wrote in his presentation. "The solution is multiple voter choice. How else can we know what your priorities are and what you want to spend your money on?"

Reiss said that providing more choice in override questions is important in part because of the increasing financial pressures Wayland taxpayers face.

Tax levies are outpacing incomes, he said, pointing out that in Massachusetts, tax levies have increased by 92 percent since 1990, while incomes have increased by only 45 percent.

In Wayland, residents' median residential value has risen by 20 percent in the past two years. The single family tax bill in Wayland averages \$263.27 a year, compared to the state average of \$92.43 a year.

Reiss also analyzed overrides that succeeded and failed in Massachusetts in recent years.

"The statistics tell me that if you break an override into smaller pieces, you can improve the chances of it passing," Reiss said in an interview.

Nearly half of Massachusetts communities are taking that approach. In fiscal year 2006, 30 override ballot questions in Massachusetts were single choice, 28 were multiple (pyramid or menu).

Selectmen Chairman Michael Tichnor said in an interview that although Reiss's presentation was "very thorough and extensive," he questioned whether statistics that compared Wayland to the rest of the state were relevant or whether they skewed the picture of the effectiveness of the different override options.

"I would strongly discourage any menu-driven override for our town," he said. "It pits department against department, board against board, citizen against citizen."

Tichnor said that because the pyramid approach is suited to specific financial situations, he would have to wait to hear from the Finance Committee before speaking more on the option.

The FinCom, which presents its budget recommendations to the town on Thursday night, will recommend both an override amount and ballot question type to the selectmen. The selectmen then decide what amount and type will appear before the voters at Town Meeting.

Reiss said that he would prefer the pyramid approach if the funding levels proffered included a true middle ground. He said he envisions the population as a bell curve of opinions, in which the majority wants to maintain town services while not being taxed to death.

If a pyramid approach with a compromise were not possible, Reiss said he would then advocate the menu approach, though he would anticipate resistance from individual town departments.

He said that although single question overrides have been historically successful in Wayland, there could be a storm brewing on the horizon.

"The rich communities of MetroWest tend to lag behind the rest of the state," he said. "Wayland could find itself very, very surprised by a lump sum this year. My gut feeling tells me we could be very close to a dice roll."

He also said he has heard concerns from some townspeople that even if the town continues to pass large overrides, those successes could diminish the state's incentive to provide aid.

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At the meeting, Reiss made a motion to post his presentation on the town's Web site, which was voted down by the board 4-1.






"It's an advocacy presentation. I don't think it's appropriate for the town Web site unless it reflects a recommendation of the board," Tichnor said.

Reiss said he respects the board's decision, but wants to make his findings available to as many residents as possible.

"This is the way I communicate. I try to analyze the data. I don't just shoot from the hip," he said. "The only way you can sleep at night is if you know you've gone through the process and done your homework, even if you're in the minority."

Residents who wish obtain a copy of Selectman Reiss' Powerpoint presentation can e-mail him at "AlanJReiss@verizon.net"

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