

## State to blame for shortfalls: Board says mandates are big reason for 2007 budget mess

By **Katie Liesener / Daily News Staff**  
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**W**AYLAND -- With talk looming of overrides and privatizing public services, the Finance Committee told a roomful of concerned residents about the difficulty of tackling a projected \$3.3 million shortfall in fiscal 2007.

"This year's going to be a challenge, probably more than in the past seven to eight years I've been on the committee," said Chairman Chris Riley.

Discussion over possible solutions to the town's fiscal problems circled back to state mandates, which the Finance Committee in large part blamed for the shortfall.

"This is not about Wayland. This is about all cities and towns in Massachusetts," Riley said. "We all face the same issues."

As an example, Riley cited the town's health care costs, which have risen an average of 22 percent a year over the last five years, jumping by \$6 million since 2004 alone. He said the town is required by state law to provide health care and other benefits to its employees via collective bargaining.

"The state can change the health care of its own employees," Riley said. "It's not bound by collective bargaining, but cities and towns are."

He said the town's similarly rising pension costs are also mandated by the state. A 1946 law requires Wayland to participate in a state-controlled pension program for its employees.

State aid to Wayland also dropped from \$5.2 million in 2003 to \$4.2 million in 2004.

Riley described the town's dependent relationship with Beacon Hill in historical terms.

"When the state was formed, it gave a charter to all towns," said Riley. "We exist at the pleasure of the state."

When residents asked the committee if there were a better way to communicate the town's needs to state officials, committee members smiled and shook their heads.

"Quite frankly, we're dealing with an urban-based leadership (in the State House)...and urban legislators raise money from people who benefit from collective bargaining being kept in place," said Town Administrator Fred Turkington, referring to the fact that a bill that would release towns from collective bargaining with their employees was never brought up for a vote.

"As much as the debate is ongoing, we can't bank on that dialogue as a solution to our problems."

That leaves the town with limited options to chip away at the \$3.3 million.

Those at the meeting suggested making the town run more efficiently. Riley pointed to the Town Building, in which the meeting was held, as an example of current efforts. After the first of the year, the building will not be opened on Thursday nights to save on energy.

He also mentioned the possibility of consolidating certain functions within the town and school, or establishing a Department of Public Works to bring several functions under one administrative roof.

"Why not fire everyone -- seriously -- and contract out instead?" asked one resident.

Though he said the Finance Committee had discussed hiring private contractors for public jobs as an option, Riley stressed that his committee legally has no control over what jobs might be privatized.

The Ad Hoc Committee, which was established by the 2005 annual Town Meeting, will be making its final recommendations on which jobs could be handled by private companies, along with other suggested cuts, on Tuesday.

In the first week in January, town departments that choose to do so will have the opportunity to appeal those recommendations before the Finance Committee, which will put together a town budget in February.

At that point, the budget will either be sent to selectmen balanced or with a recommendation for an override.

At the Finance Committee forum, Riley said he could not speculate on a scenario that far in advance.

"We as a committee have not discussed an override yet," he said. "We haven't even reviewed

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department budgets."

Riley reserved his strongest comment about an override for the years beyond the formidable challenges of fiscal year 2007.

"We're looking at a plan to balance the budget for fiscal years 2008 through 2010, without any override," he said.

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