

## Split tax rate still option: Wayland businesses expect the issue will resurface

By **Katie Liesener / Daily News Staff**  
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**W**AYLAND -- For this year, selectmen have agreed to have businesses and homeowners pay a uniform tax rate, but change may be in the wind.

The board this week initially voted 4-1 to keep a single instead of split tax rate in which businesses pay a greater burden of the town's total taxes.

The tally became unanimous when Selectman Alan Reiss recast his vote in favor of the single rate.

Reiss, who remains in favor of the split rate, said his change in vote was a courtesy to the board.

"I would have liked to see a change," he said in an interview last week.

In the weeks before the vote, opinion about the tax rate was divided. The Board of Assessors recommended the town keep its single rate of \$12.58 per \$1,000 of valuation.

The Finance Committee, however, supported a higher tax rate for businesses of up to 150 percent of the residential rate, based on its own analysis of the town's finances.

Finance Committee Chairman Chris Riley said split tax rates are being considered by several communities since the state released a report in September titled "Communities at Risk" that calls uniform rates an unfair burden to the residential community.

But the committee's suggestion fired up opposition within Wayland's business community.

"We only had a week to muster up a group effort to quash this," said Ralph Wegener of the Wayland Business Association, who presented the case for local business owners at Monday's meeting.

Wegener told selectmen about a conversation he had with Paul Broyer, senior vice president of Candela Corp., a local medical laser company. According to Wegener, Broyer told him if the split tax rate were approved, he would consider moving his company of 160 employees to New Jersey.

Selectmen Chairman Michael Tichnor said the tax rate debate was "a really close question, with very persuasive arguments on both sides."

Ultimately, the most persuasive argument for him was that a split rate could damage Wayland's already small business sector, he said.

"Artificially raising the tax rate creates another barrier (for businesses). It becomes a disincentive," he said.

The way to solve the problem of Wayland's small commercial tax base, he said, is not to further tax existing businesses, but to "truly attract new businesses."

Tichnor said this was the first year the board looked closely at the underlying issues that drive tax rates. He praised the research conducted by Reiss, who concluded that towns with split rates, such as Sudbury, did not consequently experience an exodus of businesses.

"Now they've got an engineer on the board," said Reiss, who was elected to the board in April. "I try to look at the data and analyze things."

Reiss sees his contribution as bringing the discussion to the table.

"The board really thought about it harder this year than last year," he said. "That makes me feel like I'm doing my job, by presenting all sides."

Wegener, who served on the Board of Assessors from 1981 to 1988, agreed that a split tax rate had not been a debated option in years past. Now he expects small businesses will be vigilant about the possibility of its return in the future.

"We got the results we were looking for," he said. "But this may come up again next year."

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