

## Fund pledge brings hope: Wayland officials see need for increased state aid

By **Katie Liesener / News Staff Writer**

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**W**AYLAND -- Three years of scrimping, saving and sweating overrides since cuts in state aid to cities and towns has left town officials cautiously optimistic of Gov. Mitt Romney's promise of help.

The governor announced last weekend he would provide an additional \$158 million in state aid in fiscal year 2007.

"There's been a lot of discussion lately about how state revenues have enhanced...so we expected something positive," said Town Administrator Fred Turkington, who attended Romney's speech at the Massachusetts Municipal Association's annual conference. He was one of five Wayland town officials at the conference.

"Time will tell how the money is distributed and how much it helps suburban communities," said selectmen Chairman Michael Tichnor. "I have a wait-and-see attitude."

Romney announced the increase as part of his proposed budget bill, which will be debated with House and Senate budget bills in coming months. Because those proposals will not be finalized into a single state budget until mid-June, cities and towns will not be able to count on aid increases as they finalize their own budgets in April and May, said Patricia Mikes, an MMA spokeswoman.

Finance Committee Chairman Chris Riley said Romney's announcement will not have a practical effect on Wayland's difficult deliberations over the fiscal year 2007 operational budget. But if an increase in state aid were to come through, he said, that money would be added to the town's free cash, which helps maintain the town's AAA bond rating and can be used in case of unexpected expenditures.

He called Romney's willingness to increase aid "a step in the right direction to recoup the money that's been lost." He said state aid to Wayland has decreased from \$5.2 million in 2003 to its current level of \$4.3 million.

The MMA, of which Wayland is a member, has lobbied for re-instituting state aid since the cuts were made, and continues to lobby for legislation on subjects that affect Wayland and all cities and towns, such as school building assistance and the ability for towns to seek alternative health insurance plans.

"To the extent that all towns are speaking with one voice, it's more effective than Michael (Tichnor) or I talking individually to (state Sen.) Scott Brown or (state Rep.) Sue Pope," Turkington said.

Turkington, Assistant Town Administrator John Senchyshyn and selectmen Michael Tichnor, Doug Leard and Joe Nolan joined 1,200 representatives from cities and towns throughout Massachusetts at the two-day conference to discuss and learn about these common concerns.

As their schedules permitted, the men attended a trade show and workshops on everything from health insurance to telecommunications marketing.

"Each region has its strengths, things it does well, and this is a good opportunity to meet selectmen and administrators from other towns and learn from them," Turkington said.

Registration for each of the officials cost from \$150 to \$200 and came from the town budget, he said.

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