

Mansfield Republican Town Council Member's Position on 2014/2015 Property Tax Proposal – April 8, 2014

It is time for Mansfield to tighten its belt as its residents and small businesses have done for the past five years. The only acceptable budget should be one that proposes no tax increase.

For many residents of the Town of Mansfield and the State the great recession continues. Per capita incomes are still below 2008 levels, unemployment and underemployment remain high, and small improvements in the economy have produced inflation. Groceries are more at the store, heating oil and propane, college tuitions, and rents, are all up. Housing values are still below pre-2008 levels evaporating the equity some had seen in their homes. As if the adverse economic impacts of the great recession were not enough for middle class working people, retirees and small business to deal with, in 2010 Connecticut taxpayers were hit with the largest tax increase in the history of the state and we are not out of the woods. It is being projected that the state is facing a \$3 billion deficit for the 2015/2016 biennial budget period. Taking into account all of these factors it is clear that great caution is needed at the local level as we consider spending over the course of the next two years.

Even in the face of the greatest economic downturn our country has experienced since the great depression, the year-over-year increase in Mansfield taxes for the budget periods 2010/2011 through the current 2014/2015 proposed budget is \$510.00 for residents with a median single family home (home with a an assessed tax value of \$169,900). Residents owning homes with greater assessed values are, of course, paying much more in increased taxes. Given the continuing effects of the recession, the state of the state's finances and the shrinking year-over-year state contributions in PILOT and other state aid, the tax increases are not "reasonable" or "modest" as characterized in the Town Manager's budget messages.

The result of last year's budget referendum was clear; voters believe both the Town-wide spending and the Board Of Education budgets are too high. Ignoring the vote of the people that spending be reduced, the Town Council majority chose instead to increase spending.

There are many areas in the proposed 2014/2015 budget which could be handled differently or put off for a year without impacting the programs or services the Town provides. Some of these areas include reductions of deposits to reserve fund, restoring the Superintendent's original spending plan, the way we pay some of the two hundred odd temporary and per diem staff can change to reduce labor overhead and some capital purchases could be delayed. The budgeting review process has also identified other elements that can result in expense reductions. At some point in the near future the grand list will grow with elements of the Storrs Center coming to completion and these reductions may be restored.