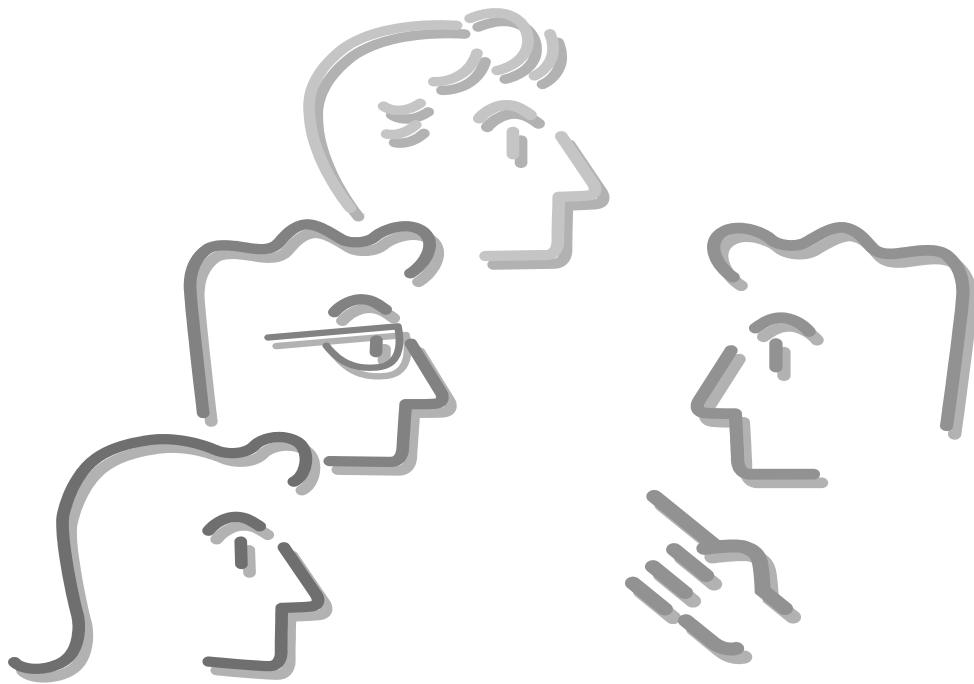


Know Your Town

Becoming an Informed Citizen

2003



Presented By:

New 'N Towne
of Medfield, MA

And



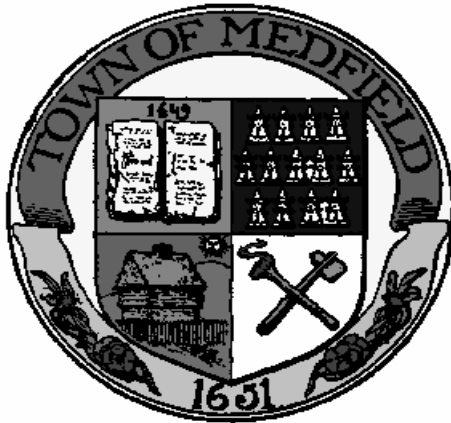
The League of Women Voters of Medfield

Welcome to ***Know Your Town: Becoming an Informed Citizen***. This evening is co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Medfield and the New 'N Towne Club of Medfield so that you, the citizens of Medfield, can better "Know Your Town" and become involved in the life of your community. The League of Women Voters encourages active participation of citizens in government and community while New 'N Towne provides community activities and social contacts during a time of transition into a new community. With this common purpose, these two groups joined forces to reach out to the community in order to get even more individuals involved in town government.

This is the second part of a two-part program. The first was ***Know Your Town: Clubs and Organizations***, held earlier this year. A companion directory was produced that includes an impressive list of 50 clubs and organizations that help make Medfield the vibrant and desirable community that it is. The directory is available for a \$1.00 donation. Call Kathy Brennan at 508-359-6612 for a copy.

We would like to thank Richard DeSorgher, Marie Zack Nolan and Marjorie Temple for helping to present the information. We would also like to thank all our members who worked to bring this project from idea to fruition. We would especially like to thank the LWV "Know Your Town" and "Bulletin" committees whose publications were used as resources.

Compiled and written by Susan Cotter for ***Know Your Town: Becoming an Informed Citizen*** seminar. Thursday, March 20, 2003, 7:30 pm, High School Lecture Hall.



Before we get started with our questions and answers about town governance and finance, let us tell you a bit about Medfield's history.

Medfield was once part of Dedham. In 1649, Dedham held a town meeting, which approved the laying out of an area for a new town; this was accomplished in the early spring of 1650 and corresponds very nearly with the boundaries of the present town. It was incorporated as the 43rd town in Massachusetts on June 2, 1651.

Medfield was involved with the quest for democracy from the start. In 1774 the town sponsored 25 Minutemen to fight in the battles of Lexington and Concord, though they did not arrive in time to fight. One hundred and fifty-four men fought in the Continental Army. That made the ratio of soldiers one for every five of the population. By 1787 a new oath was required of the town officers who renounced loyalty to the king and swore allegiance to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The people of Medfield prepared themselves to fight in the Civil War following the election of an abolitionist senator who would represent the district. Eighty-two men served in the army and navy and fifteen men gave their lives for the preservation of the Union.

Long before the 19th amendment to the Constitution in 1920, Medfield encouraged the voting rights of women. In 1900, seven women paid a poll tax and qualified to vote. As early as 1881 women voted for the school committee and by 1916, women were permitted to serve on the school committee, as overseers of the poor and as trustees of the public library. When the state constitution was amended to conform to the federal law, 48 of the 381 votes cast were by women.

Anyone wanting a more detailed history of Medfield may refer to *History of the Town of Medfield, Massachusetts: 1650-1886* by William S. Tilden and *History of the Town of Medfield, Massachusetts: 1887-1925* by Richard P. DeSorgher.

What is the Town Charter?

The town charter is, basically, Medfield's constitution. It establishes the form and structure of government. It provides for a "selectmen-open town meeting plan" form of government. It vests legislative authority of the town in the town meeting which is open to all registered voters.

The town charter sets forth the roles of the moderator, the warrant committee, the board of selectmen, the town administrator, the school committee and other elected offices. It provides for town elections and describes rules for becoming a candidate for office. It specifies the responsibilities of town officials as well as the procedure for recalling elected officials.

It requires updating of the bylaws every five years. It provides for changes to the charter either by an elected charter commission (regarding the composition of the town meeting; or the composition, mode of election or terms of office of the board of selectmen) or by ballot of the whole town at a regular or special election (regarding proposed amendments). It requires the selectmen to form a committee every ten years

to study the workings of town government and recommended procedures to revise the charter if that is deemed advisable.

The town charter gives the selectmen the power to declare a state of emergency and sets forth the order of succession if selectmen are unable to perform "remedial activities." The succession is treasurer, chairman of the planning board, the moderator and the town clerk.

The full text of the charter can be viewed on line by going to www.town.medfield.net and clicking on the "town regulations" link.

What are the Town Bylaws?

The town bylaws cover more detailed rules, regulations and procedures for a wide range of town governmental activities. It describes the dates and times for town meetings and elections. It covers administration and finance, town officers, police regulations, street numbering, snow removal, dog control, council on aging, wetland, parking, utilities, hazardous materials, civil defense, historic district, fire alarms, historic and archeological demolition bylaw enforcement and public sewer. There is a separate zoning bylaw as well as rules and regulations for subdivisions. Bylaws are added, amended or deleted by votes at town meeting. The full text of the town bylaw can be viewed on line by going to www.town.medfield.net and clicking on the "town regulations" link.

What are the responsibilities of the Board of Selectmen?

The executive branch of government consists of a three-member board of selectmen, the town's chief executive officers. The board is empowered to administer and implement decisions of town meeting and to establish policy and guidelines for the coordination of local government operations. The selectmen are assisted in their duties by an appointed full-time administrator and assistant administrator.

Under Medfield's town charter, the selectmen also serve as commissioners of the police department and as the town licensing authority. The selectmen appoint certain town officials and fill vacancies that occur in other elective positions. They establish operating and capital budgets in cooperation with all department heads under their jurisdiction. The board calls elections, draws up the town meeting warrant and publishes Medfield's annual report. Information is found in the annual report on all departments, financial matters, vital statistics and elections. Copies may be found at the public library, town hall and at the annual town meeting. The selectmen must exercise leadership, anticipate and forestall problems, participate in long-range planning, relay accurate information, and know their legal limitations and applicable laws.

How do I register to vote?

If you are at least 18 years old by election day and a U.S. citizen you may register to vote at the town clerk's office at town hall. There are special evening and Saturday registration hours prior to elections. The deadline dates for registration are 28 days prior to a state or national primary or election and 20 days prior to a town election. In Massachusetts, voters changing names through court action or marriage or moving from one community to another must re-register. The law now conveniently allows voters to register anywhere voter registration is held and the information will be forwarded to the voter's town of residence.

Where do I vote?

Although the town is divided into four precincts, all voting takes place at the Wheelock School on Elm Street. The polls are open from 6 a.m. to 8 pm.

What do I do if my name isn't on the voting list?

The poll warden is responsible for having both active and inactive voting lists at the polling place. There is no such thing as being "dropped" from the list. If a citizen is on the inactive list, they may vote after filling out a form called an "Affirmation of Current and Continuous Residency" and showing identification. If they are not on either list, the warden must have a mechanism with which to communicate with the local election office (town clerk's office at town hall) during an election in order to determine if the voter is qualified to cast a ballot. If the person is entitled to vote but not on the lists, an "Affirmation of Current and Continuous Residence Certificate" is completed. A voter can still pursue the right to vote by going to the election office. If all else fails, the voter may fill out an escrow ballot that is only counted if the ballots may change the result of the election. The escrow ballot can also be used if the voter claims a different party enrollment than the records indicate. If an un-enrolled voter (commonly called independent) votes in a presidential primary, they are then listed as registered in that party for the following election unless they change their designation back prior to the next election. This may be done at the town clerk's office at town hall.

What is a ballot question?

When the electorate is asked to vote on something other than a candidate it is usually in the form of a question, hence the name ballot question.

What is a ballot initiative committee?

When there is a ballot question, ballot initiative committees sometimes form to advocate for or against the ballot question. This is a very basic way for our citizens to become active participants in our democracy. The purpose of the ballot initiative committee is to succeed in passing or defeating a ballot question.

What is poll observing?

As described in "Election Day Legal Summary" a publication of the Elections Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, poll observing or checking is allowed to achieve the legal requirement that the election be held in public view. Observers are allowed to keep notes including marked voting lists. Poll workers must announce the names of voters loud enough for the observers to hear. The observers must not be disorderly or obstruct access of voters. The observers do not ascertain how a voter has voted nor do they attempt to influence the action of the voter. Typically, poll checkers are trying to make sure that their supporters have made it to the polls. This is a practice that is used in all kinds of contested elections as well as ballot questions. It is an important tool of our democracy and helps to keep our elections public and free.

Activity that is designed to influence the action of the voter, such as holding a sign or distributing a pamphlet, is required to be kept 150 feet from the polling place. This includes political buttons, so take off those buttons when you go in to vote.

How can I get more information about local elections?

The League of Women Voters (LWV) of Medfield compiles *Candid Views* a complete listing of candidates for town offices. *Candid Views* invites a brief statement from each candidate and is distributed to every household in Medfield. LWV of Medfield also sponsors a Candidates' Forum to provide an opportunity for the voters to meet candidates for local offices and to ask them questions prior to town elections.

What is Town Meeting for?

The annual town meeting for the transaction of town business is usually held on the last Monday in April at 7:30 p.m. at the high school. After the first session, further meetings are held until all articles in the warrant have been acted upon. Typically, town meeting lasts for two days. Both last year and this year, town meeting has been delayed in order to get a better idea of how the state budget would effect Medfield.

Every registered voter may be present to take part in and vote on all town business included in the articles of the warrant, including the town budget. A quorum of 250 voters must be present for the meeting to take place.

As the legislative body of town government, the Medfield's annual town meeting authorizes funds for the operating budgets of all town departments and approves borrowing of money and issuing of bonds. The town meeting establishes policy and procedures of town administration; it adopts, amends and repeals town bylaws and zoning laws.

What is a Special Town Meeting?

A special town meeting may be called by the selectmen in response to a petition signed by 200 voters, or at any time the selectmen deem necessary. One hundred signatures are necessary to include an article in the warrant of a special town meeting.

What is the Warrant?

Town meeting is called by issuing a document called a warrant. The warrant, drawn by the selectmen, states the time and place of town meeting and the agenda of business to be considered. Action may not be taken on any matter at town meeting unless it is within the scope of an article in the warrant.

Any registered voter may include an article in the warrant by filing with the selectmen a request signed by ten registered voters. The date for the closing of the warrant and the date of the town meeting are announced by the selectmen. This announcement appears in the local newspaper and is sent by letter to town boards and departments.

The warrant consists of articles submitted by town departments, selectmen and citizen petitions, listed randomly and acted on by a lottery system to ensure fair representation of voters.

What does the Moderator do?

The moderator is elected for a one-year term to preside over the annual and special town meetings. The moderator is responsible for appointing members to the warrant committee and to the permanent school planning and building committee. The

moderator is also part of the three-member appointing authority that names members to the personnel board.

What is the responsibility of the Warrant Committee?

The Medfield Town Charter establishes an independent, permanent advisory committee, called the warrant committee, whose members are appointed by the moderator. The nine board members serve three-year terms. Its primary function is to review, evaluate and make recommendations to town meeting on all articles in the warrant, including all operating and capital budgets.

How are budgets developed?

The various departments are responsible for developing their budgets. Most of the town budget is expended for town employees such as teachers, police officers, department of public works employees and town administration staff. Many town employees are part of collective bargaining units whose contracts are renegotiated every three years. Therefore, many of the budgetary increases from year to year are dictated by these contracts.

The warrant committee works with the various departments, the town administrator and the board of selectmen to develop an overall town budget. Preliminary recommendations are presented to voters at a public hearing, which must be held not less than thirty days prior to annual town meeting. Final recommendations are then published and distributed to each household.

While the warrant committee is responsible for recommending the annual town budget for vote by the town meeting, it is ultimately the responsibility of the town meeting members to appropriate funds required for the town's financial needs.

How is the budget funded?

The principal revenue sources include real estate and personal property taxes, state aid, motor vehicle excise tax receipts, water and sewer receipts, interest earnings on investment, user fees, licenses, permits and fines.

What is Proposition 2½?

Proposition 2½ is a law, passed in 1981, that limits the annual growth in the tax levy to 2.5% over the prior year's levy. The limitation also restricts the property tax rate to a maximum of \$25 per thousand of valuation. The law allows a city or town to increase tax revenues above the limit with voter approval.

What is an override?

An override is the vehicle used to obtain voter approval to increase the tax levy above the 2.5% annual growth limit. A goal of Proposition 2½ was to shift decision-making power over expenditures to the general electorate. Barbara Anderson of Citizens for a Limited Taxation, a proponent of Proposition 2½ explained, "... an override is not a way around Proposition 2½ but a part of 2½. The whole purpose of 2½ was to establish the ascendancy of voters over government."

There are two types of voter-approved increases in taxing authority.

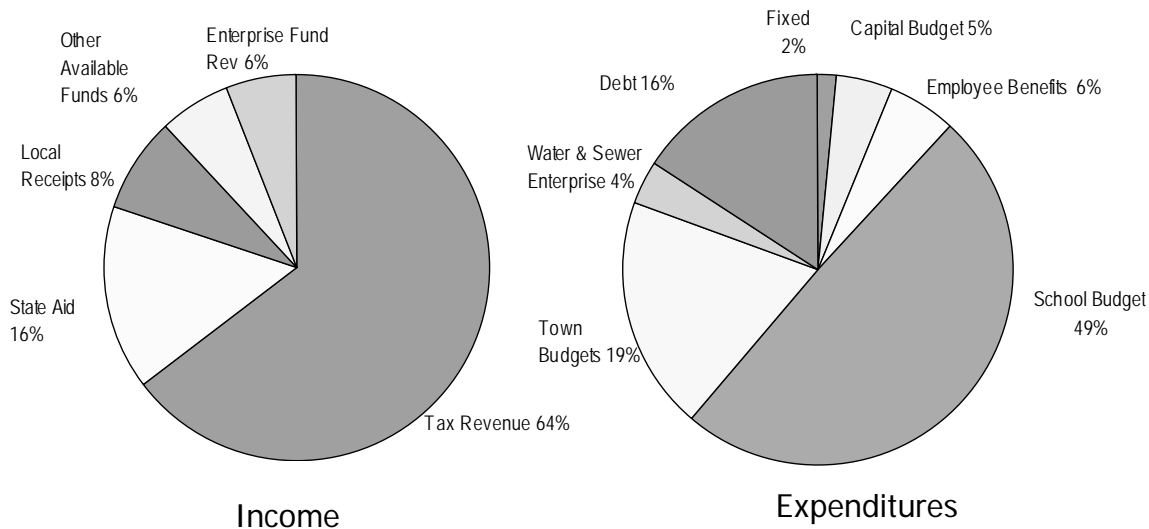
A levy limit **override** increases the amount of property tax revenue a community may

raise in the year specified in the override question and in future years. It increases the community's levy limit and becomes part of the base for calculating future years' levy limits. The result is a permanent increase in taxing authority. This type of override is used for operating budget increases because they will continue in the future.

An **exclusion** increases the amount of property tax revenue a community may raise for a limited period of time in order to fund specific projects. The amount of an exclusion may be raised in addition to the community's levy limit. It does not increase the community's levy limit nor does it become part of the base for calculating future years' levy limits. This is also called a debt exclusion override and is used to finance bonds for construction projects and it goes away when the debt is paid off.

Give me a snapshot of Medfield's Income and Expenditures.

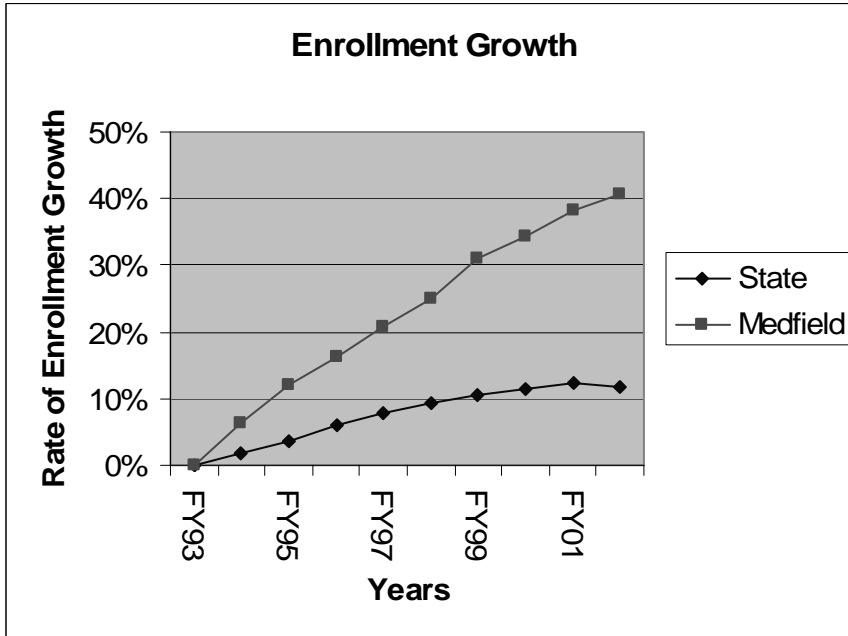
FY '03 Town of Medfield Budget



What is Chapter 70 and how does its "formula" effect Medfield?

Chapter 70 is the state aid to education. Medfield has not been treated fairly over the last decade due to the inequities of the Chapter 70 funding formula. Medfield has received less than it should relative to its equalized property value per pupil (EPV). EPV is the amount of tax base that the town has the ability to tax per pupil compared to other communities.

This funding problem is exacerbated in communities that have experienced rapid enrollment growth since the inception of ed reform. Medfield's annual average growth from 1993 through 1999 was 6.36% compared to 2.36% statewide for the same period. The state average percentage of the population in the school systems is 15%; Medfield's is 23% (the highest percentage in the state).

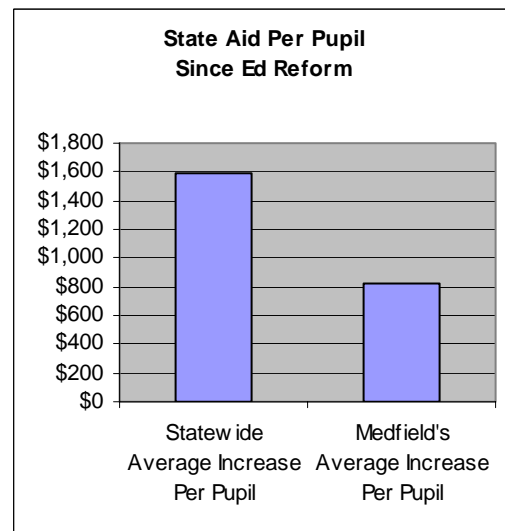
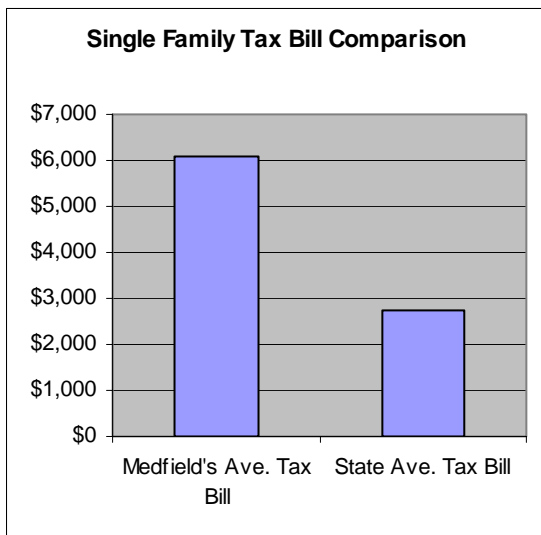


The average non-residential tax base in the state is 16%, Medfield has only 6%. This has resulted in the 16th highest single-family tax bill in the state. The average single-family tax bill in Medfield is \$6,089 while the state average is \$2,740.

Even though Medfield's property tax base per pupil is near the median for all cities and

towns in Massachusetts, it has consistently received one of the lowest levels of state aid to education in the commonwealth. This is due to the per capita income adjustment in the formula even though towns are not authorized to tax income. The ed reform legislation has expired and the formula is in the process of being improved and simplified. At this writing the governor's budget contains a simplified formula; however, this formula retains the income adjustment, and perpetuates one of the flaws of the original formula.

During ed reform, many cities and towns that were losing population were held harmless from reductions in aid to education. Had aid been reduced in cities and towns that were seeing declining enrollment, there would have been adequate funds for rapid enrollment growth towns.



Due to these inequities, Medfield has struggled to keep per pupil spending as low as possible. In FY 01, our per-pupil spending was \$5,825, one of the lowest levels in the state. In fact Medfield ranked 314th out of 327 school districts for per pupil spending that year. The state average was \$7,561. While the state classifies Medfield as wealthy due to per capita income, the per-pupil spending in the wealthiest 25% of districts was over \$8,000.

WHO SPEAKS FOR YOU IN GOVERNMENT? MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD! Contact Your Representatives About Issues Important to You	
<p style="text-align: center;">Federal Government</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Senators</p> <p>Edward M. Kennedy (617) 565-3170 Room 2400 senator@kennedy.senate.gov JFK Federal Building Boston, MA 02203</p> <p>Room 315 (202) 224-2742 Russell Senate Building Washington, DC 20510</p> <p>John F. Kerry (617) 565-8519 1 Bowdoin Square 10th Floor Boston, MA 02114</p> <p>Room 412 (202) 224-2742 Russell Senate Building john_kerry@kerry.senate.gov Washington, DC 20510</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Representative (9th Congressional District)</p> <p>Stephen F. Lynch (617) 428-2000 John Joseph Moakley Federal Courthouse 1 Courthouse Way, Suite 3110 Boston, MA 02210</p> <p>235 Cannon HOB (202) 225-8273 Washington, D.C. 20515 stephen.lynnch@mail.house.gov</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Why should I have their numbers taped</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">State Government</p> <p style="text-align: center;">State Senator (District of Bristol and Norfolk)</p> <p>Jo Ann Sprague..... (617) 722-122 Room 206..... State House Boston, MA 02133.....</p> <p style="text-align: center;">State Representatives</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Lida Harkins (13th Norfolk District) rep.lidaharkins@hou.state.ma.us Medfield Precincts 1 & 2 Room 343 State House Boston, MA 02133</p> <p>Scott P. Brown..... (9th Norfolk District) rep.scottbrown@hou.state.ma.us Medfield Precincts 3 & 4 Room 237 State House Boston, MA 02133</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Governor</p> <p>The Honorable Mitt Romney (617) 727-360 Office of the Governor..... mitt.romney@state.ma.u State House, Room 360 Boston, MA 02133</p> <p>Lt. Governor Kerry Healey ltgovernor@state.ma.us kerry.healey@state.ma.us</p>

Why should I have their numbers taped near my phone?

As you can see by the discussion of education funding, legislative decisions have a tremendous impact on Medfield's town finances and services. Decisions are currently being made that will continue to affect Medfield. The current FY '04 Budget currently being decided in the state legislature will have a direct impact on services right here in Medfield. If every citizen took the time to call their representatives on important issues, we may have a different outcome.

How does redistricting affect me?

As our constitution requires, every ten years our government uses the Census of the United States for determining congressional representation. After each census, the Census Bureau assigns each state the number of seats it will have in the U.S. House of Representatives for the next ten years. Individual states are given the responsibility of drawing legislative boundaries for congressional districts as well as for state legislative districts. In Massachusetts, this process is done by the state legislature. Obviously, the configuration of the constituency of a district has impact on how well a town is represented. If the towns in a district have competing interests, the representative may have a difficult time advocating strongly on behalf of one group of constituents over the other. Conversely, if the towns have similar interests, the representative may be free to advocate more aggressively on their behalf.

The last redistricting took effect for the November 2002 election based on the 2001 release of state population data from the 2000 Census. On the national level, the new plan left Medfield in the 9th Congressional District with Stephen Lynch as representative, though Medfield nearly became part of the 5th District in the process. The new 9th District, however, does have a different configuration. It now includes parts of Boston, Needham, Dedham, Westwood, Norwood, Medfield, Walpole, Canton, Randolph, Braintree, Stoughton, Holbrook, Avon, parts of Brocton, Whitman, parts of Hanson, parts of Easton, West Bridgewater, East Bridgewater and Bridgewater.

During the redistricting, there was a significant change in our representation to the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Representative John Rogers, who had recently become chair of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, no longer represents Medfield. John Rogers had been the representative for Precincts 2 and 3, part of the 12th Norfolk District. Under the new plan, which went into effect in January of '03, Precinct 2 became part of the 13th Norfolk District that is represented by Lida Harkins. The 13th Norfolk now consists of the town of Dover, Precincts 1 and 2 of the town of Medfield, and the town of Needham. Precinct 3 became part of the 9th Norfolk, which is represented by Scott P. Brown. The 9th Norfolk now consists of Precincts 3 and 4, of the town of Medfield, Precinct 1 of the town of Millis, the towns of Norfolk and Plainville, Precinct 5 of the town of Walpole, and the town of Wrentham.

Medfield's State Senator, Jo Ann Sprague, continued to represent Medfield but her district changed. What was the District of Norfolk, Bristol & Plymouth became the District of Bristol and Norfolk. The new district consists of parts of the city of Attleboro, and the towns of Mansfield, Norton, Rehoboth, and Seekonk in the county of Bristol; and the towns of Dover, Foxborough, Medfield, parts of the town of Sharon and Walpole in the county of Norfolk.

Locally, the Census is also used to prepare a re-precincting plan that is presented by the Town Clerk and voted and accepted by the Board of Selectmen. There were several small areas in town that shifted from one precinct to another.

Why should I ALWAYS vote?

You may think it doesn't matter, but it does. Active participation in our democracy will keep our country and our community strong. There are many examples in history of candidates winning elections by one vote. A recent important ballot question in Medfield was decided by a margin of only 39 votes.

Why should I ALWAYS attend Town Meeting?

Every decision made by voters in Medfield effects your daily life. Don't leave the decision to someone else. Let YOUR voice be heard.

Are the Selectmen or any of the elected officials paid for their service to the Town of Medfield?

For several centuries the Selectmen's "pay" was to dine out once a year at the "ordinary" (tavern) at the town's expense. Currently, Medfield Selectmen receive a nominal stipend for carrying out their responsibilities. Most of the other elected and appointed officials are not paid. If it wasn't for a dedicated group of volunteers, our town could not function. Medfield needs you! Please look for ways to participate in your town government. We would like to thank each and every one of our elected and appointed officials for the work they do for our community.