



TOWN OF EASTON
MASSACHUSETTS
Office of the Town Administrator

DAVID A. COLTON
Town Administrator

June 12, 2009

Open Letter to the Residents and Taxpayers of Easton

Regarding the Board of Health and the Fiscal Condition of the Town

After the events of annual town meeting on June 8th, I know some of you may be angry with me and are not inclined to read this with an open mind. All I ask of you is to please try.

This is our reality - the fiscal condition of the Town of Easton is suffering the very same ills that our country and states are enduring and that have profoundly affected many of you. Real Estate and excise tax collections are down significantly; State Aid was slashed by \$265,587 this year and will be cut by at least an additional \$252,770 in the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2009. We began the budget process with a \$2.3M deficit which may grow even more, by as much as \$715,000, when the State finally adopts a budget later this month.

The Town Charter vests a great deal of responsibility for the fiscal condition of the Town in the Administrator. As the legislative body for the town, Annual Town Meeting also plays a significant role in government by exercising wide ranging powers to appropriate money and pass by-laws. The Selectmen, School Committee, Superintendent of Schools, Finance Committee, and other elected and appointed officials have duties and responsibilities under law. By design, no one body has supreme power. This past week I exercised my authority as Administrator and Chief Fiscal Officer to make changes to the way we operate our Health Department. Some of you clearly disagree on this new course of action - that's ok. The checks and balances of government ensure that the system is working and we needn't react with vitriol or undue emotion.

This isn't the first time I didn't spend money appropriated by Town Meeting. Last fall the Superintendent and I initiated a spending freeze and I laid-off the Director of Planning. We did it because the Town was inching toward financial chaos when the Governor cut local aid in the middle of the year. No one thought we were violating

the “directive” of Town Meeting who had appropriated the money six months earlier. No one said I didn’t have the authority to lay off the Planning Director because Town Meeting appropriated money for that purpose. They didn’t say it because they would be wrong. The fact that the Director of Health was laid off days after Town meeting doesn’t make it any less appropriate than the layoff of the Planning Director six months earlier.

The absolute truth of the matter is that my plan to privatize septic system inspections and reduce staff actually results in MORE time (70 hours per quarter) available for Health Department staff to carry out the important work of the department that protects the public health of the community, like inspecting restaurants, dumpsters, swimming pools, and school cafeterias along with dealing with flu, rabies and other illness. I demonstrated this to the Finance Committee and Selectmen. The proof is posted on the Town website and is available at Town Hall to anyone who wants to see it.

Change is never easy. But it is necessary. In the end, despite all you have heard to the contrary this fiscally responsible plan actually accomplishes what the taxpayers of Easton expect their public officials to do: Provide more service for fewer dollars.

David A. Colton

Town Administrator