

# VILLAGE VIEW

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It would be a lot more fun to talk about witches, hobgoblins, black cats and jack-o-lanterns on this All Hallow's Eve; instead, we consider more serious subjects. Perhaps the best approach is to pose some questions, give some answers, and then ask questions that can be answered only at the polls.

What will happen if Proposition 2½ passes? Will the state sales tax be increased? It might well be. Is that all bad? Not necessarily because the individual purchaser has a choice about what he buys and how much he spends. Taxpayers as individuals, however, have no choice. They must pay assessed taxes whether or not benefits accrue to them.

Can the state legislature amend the law as offered by the proposed initiative petition? Yes. Will it? Probably.

What then, is the point of voting for or against it? How else and how more clearly can we advise our elected representatives to the state legislature that we are serious about limiting taxation? Our past pleas to them to hold down expenses have gone unheeded, year after year.

If, as every politician in office or out is threatening, passage of Proposition 2½ will mean drastic cuts in services, is there any way needed services could later be restored? Yes. An increase in expenditures could be authorized by a two-thirds vote in a general election.

What might politicians better be doing than crying wolf about cuts in services? They might, for one thing, busy themselves with their appointed tasks, such as setting the tax rate and enabling the Town Clerk to get the tax bills out on time so the Town won't be forced to borrow in anticipation of tax receipts, and pay interest on the loan.

Are important services such as fire and police protection actually threatened by placing a cap on taxes? Not likely. It may be that certain privileges could be reduced, however; it may be that fire stations cease to serve as "club rooms" for personnel and, instead, function as they are intended to, as centrally-located storage facilities for fire-fighting equipment and vehicles.

Will residents of our town find it necessary to pay for services now provided without fees? That could certainly be one result. Is that so bad? Why should not expenses of certain services be borne by those who use them?

Is there good reason for rescue trucks to make several trips daily between doctors' offices and nursing homes to transport ambulatory patients to medical appointments? Would it not make better sense for physicians to visit nursing homes and see several patients under one roof? Or a patient to call a taxi? In any case, should transportation costs be borne by taxpayers?

And, should a rescue truck call be necessary, why should not the cost of this service be paid for by whoever needs it, rather than lumped together with services everyone must pay for through taxation? Is there not a greater opportunity for abuse of this service when it is available without fee? Is it not fairer that he who uses it pays for it? And that he who does not is relieved of that financial burden?

Many services are now available to residents of our town without users having to pay for them except through taxes assessed annually. Every new house built must be inspected by building, wiring and plumbing inspectors. Every renovation involving new plumbing or construction requires similar inspections. Why should these costs be borne equally by all town property-owners?

Is there benefit to taxpayers when housing developments sprawl through our woodlands? Or is there, instead, a greater burden to be borne as newcomers demand new roads be plowed in winter and swept in summer, and as school enrollments swell, and as demands for more and more services are heard at Town Hall?

Police and fire protection costs have doubled and redoubled as the town's population has grown. Do we need all this protection? We do, assuredly, for the days we safely left our car keys in the ignition and our houses unlocked are long behind us. Now, unless we're foolhardy, we padlock our cellars and garages, and deadbolt our doors before retiring. We remove our keys and lock our cars. Arson is a growing menace in all Cape communities.

None of us hopes to strip away the necessary protections by voting for Proposition 2½. We do, nonetheless, hope to inform the politicians on Beacon Hill, in City Hall, in Town Buildings, and yes, on school committees, as well, that we've reached the limit of taxability.

Let me share with you a comment made by an erstwhile member of the Barnstable School Committee when I asked him where the money would come from for a program he supported. "Don't worry about getting the money; that's no problem!" he assured me. What the school committee wants, in other words, it gets.

Let me share with you a comment made in my presence by a town official of Barnstable queried about filling in a certain wetland. "Don't worry about that; we'll just dump some sand in there, and once it's done, nobody will be able to do anything about it. Then we can enlarge that parking lot." He did when he met my eye, have the grace to shift in his chair, flush, and drop his glance. That particular wetland has not yet been filled. But others have been. And suits have been filed. And fines have been levied and paid. But the wetlands are gone.

There were days, there were years, when I served as Town Meeting Representative. There were days, there were years, when I served on town committees as a volunteer. No more. I cannot lend my name to committees made up of such as these. Perhaps because they draw salaries from town coffers, perhaps because I'm not aggressive enough, perhaps because I have been, after all, only a volunteer, my voice has gone unheeded. Mine is but one vote among several of the opposite opinion.

And, once again, with Proposition 2½ mine will be but one vote and may be wasted. Many Massachusetts voters will be swayed by the politicians. Many will fear our special educational programs will be curtailed; surely teachers and school administrators feel threatened by the initiative. Many will think of the one-time fees to be paid for services now provided free-of-charge.

But this time mine will not be a lone vote against a handful of opposing ones; this time my vote will be multiplied by thousands and thousands of others, cast by thoughtful and responsible property-owners, renters, auto-owners, taxpayers all, who have for years carried their load and who, finally, have the hard-won opportunity to send to the legislature our message.

How else, indeed, can we impress on them the seriousness of our position? How else can we make ourselves truly heard? For the first time in memory we can tell our elected representatives "Stop. We've reached the limit. Enough."

Last year during Halloween's wee small hours, the legislature voted itself a generous pay-raise. Proposition 2½ appears to be the best chance Massachusetts has ever had to counteract political Trick or Treat.