

FIRST SELECTMAN COLUMN

09/07/23 ISSUE DATE

I hope everyone had a safe and fun Labor Day weekend. I guess summer is over....goodness, where did it go? Just a quick reminder at the top here that our regularly scheduled monthly Board of Selectmen meeting in September is on September 21. (This was changed from the original date of September 28.)

The first of three public forums regarding the Sherman School Renovation Project occurred last week and it was a success in terms of participation and information provided. Nearly 100 residents showed up to take a tour and then listen to a building committee presentation. After that there was an extensive question/answer/comment session that proved informative. The presentation showed a timeline of how this renovation came about, offered tangible reasons as to why this is necessary, and showed what is being renovated. I must commend the building committee on its work over the past 17 months. The committee is made up of eight individuals, each of whom have excelled in their fields. Among the committee members are two successful builders, a security expert, a business/financial manager, a project manager, an architect, and two education professionals. They each dedicated and volunteered countless hours to this plan that the public will vote on in a referendum on October 7 in Charter Hall.

The presentation also outlined the project's cost which is slated to be \$46 million. Of the \$45.5 million of eligible costs, \$11,213,595 will likely be covered through State reimbursement. The amount that the Town would bond for in a 20-year bond will cost \$35,990,387. The project's direct cost to taxpayers in debt service graduates to its highest rate (a 19% increase) in 2033 and then tapers down gradually from there. Overall, the project's tax increase averaged out over the 20 year bond is 14% annually.

The presentation made note of the 2018 tax rate. I'm not sure everyone in attendance understood what that meant. Since 2018, taxes in Sherman have decreased by 12.2%. It isn't incorrect math to consider that since taxes have decreased these last six years that a tax increase juxtaposed against the decrease softens the blow here. Looking at it that way, one could possibly consider this a 2% increase using the 2018 tax rate as a baseline. That's what was meant by this at the presentation. But it's more than math; it's more of a financial philosophical question. For some, this perspective will be soothing and for others – especially if you moved to Sherman a year ago – it may mean very little. To them, and many others, an increase is an increase. In general, taxes and your perception of what you receive for paying them is completely an individual matter. This has been the basis of political arguments for centuries.

Regarding direct costs, although they slowly graduate and then slowly reduce over the course of 20 years, a Sherman taxpayer will pay about \$196 annually for every \$100,000 of assessed property value starting in 2028. Then it increases gradually year by year and the top level is \$282 annually per \$100,000 of assessed value in 2033. From there it gradually decreases. The median house value presently in Sherman is \$468,200. The tax dollar increase for a homeowner right at the median price in 2028 will be \$917 annually and in 2033 it is slated to be \$1,321 annually. Then it begins to decrease.

Someone in the audience asked about the State's proposal to potentially circumvent our local zoning and force affordable housing on Sherman. This plan is commonly known as The Fair Share Plan, although versions of it under varying degrees of severity exist under other names. The reason this is important is that, if fully realized, it could add as many as 300 students. (It would stress ALL services including public works and emergency services and be an absolute game-changing here on our taxes.) To my understanding, after reaching out to state officials and local state legislators, all forced affordable housing plans are currently on hold. But they are not dead.

These affordable housing plans, brought to the general assembly by a minority of urban legislators, have been met with great resistance from Town leaders almost entirely across the state. I have voiced my opposition several times on many levels. The council of government that Sherman belongs to, WESTCOG, is absolutely against these plans. The question asked at the meeting was, "How do we prepare for this?" We prepare for this letting those state legislators know that these mandates have profoundly negative effects. Yes, the state needs more affordable housing, but it cannot be done in a forced mandate.



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TOWN OF SHERMAN