

**NAU Forum 11/15/07 – Questions submitted as of 11/15/07**

**Questions for School Superintendent and Committee:**

1. Is the student population continuing to grow?
2. How does the Osgood Landing development and new affordable housing development affect the student population growth?
3. Are there issues with class sizes in the lower grades?
4. What are plans to accommodate growth? Do we need another school or expansion of existing schools? Who is going to pay for it?
5. Towns are often rated on their desirability based on MCAS scores. Our rankings have been declining from the top. What is the plan to improve these scores and would you be willing to have a local volunteers corps be part of a tutoring solution?
6. Does it make sense to continue offering full day kindergarten? What is the real cost and benefit of this service? According to the info I have, there is NO measurable benefit to the whole community from full day kindergarten. The MEASURABLE cost to all elementary students is reduction of their art and music programing, reduced access to libraries, and reduced flexibility in use of classroom space. Half day and full day students are supposed to be equally prepared for first grade, not providing a two tiered educational opportunity for free vs. pay. The original thinking under Harry Harutunian was as a money maker in the district, that parents would pay the full cost of the educator, which was found to be illegal. SO, it is not a money maker and not a greater educational opportunity. Instead, full-day kindergarten reduces classroom space for all elementary students. Art and music have lost their designated space resulting in change of staff and diminished offerings in both areas. Additionally, libraries in some schools now host classrooms and special ed services. If we eliminate all-day kindergarten, we can accommodate unexpected increased in certain grade levels, as well as space designated for art, music, and library services.
7. As best I can gather, we are woefully underusing computers in our middle school and perhaps our high school as well. Organizations such as Virtual High School exist which provide on-line education which can broaden the range of offerings to students while not impacting the number of teachers at the school. Are there any plans of introducing on-line curriculum offerings for our students? If one can get a UMass Bachelors Degree without ever stepping foot into a classroom, should we not taking advantage of these types of offerings as well?
8. This question is specifically regarding the elementary school libraries being closed for a second consecutive year. What can be done to re-open those libraries this year, if not this year then next, either on part of volunteers, existing employees taking on additional or new responsibilities? What external funds might be available to North Andover to help off-set the costs, e.g. through grants or a partnership with a commercial company? And if a concerned North Andover citizen wanted to pursue this matter further, what resources exist in this area.

9. What is being done to open all the school libraries in town?  
I understand that the Middle School library is now open - but what of the other schools? *(duplicate of prior question)*
10. And, perhaps, an even more important question:  
Will future union contracts ensure that volunteers may be used if necessary to staff school libraries if union members can not be used?
11. In the IAQ review, one of the leading problems was that our school committee received no training from the state organization on how to operate a school committee in Massachusetts. In light of the recent Open Meeting Violations, and the past history with Dr. Harutunian that some many of us would like to forget, do any members of the current school committee have plans to receive training on the proper role and procedures of a school committee? I believe the training is free.
12. I have been tracking North Andover's MCAS scores over the last ten years - especially at the elementary school level - and have found that many of our elementary schools have shown double digit declines in performance - and the school department has does nothing about it. Neither has the state for that matter. Why don't you review MCAS results school by school and grade by grade? What are your plans to address North Andover schools with failure rates doubling and some as high as 25%? (these rates do not include the needs improvement category)
13. Please explain what "AP" courses are, and is there a financial benefit to increasing the size of these classes?
14. Last year middle school parents said very loudly that they wanted foreign language classes restored. Those teachers were, but the textbooks are awful. How can we provide good foreign language instruction without decent textbooks?
15. What sorts of specific actions have other towns taken, both inside and outside of the classroom, to successfully improve MCAS scores? What is the leadership of North Andover's immediate plan in terms improving MCAS scores and incorporating the techniques used successfully in other towns? Specifically, can the schools bring in after-school programs which focus on MCAS-tested material?
16. Good Evening, At a PTO meeting during the first week of October, Dr. Marini mentioned that he and the elementary school principals were meeting and trying to figure out a method to open the elementary school libraries this school year. Would you give us an update on where the project is, and how parent volunteers can be used to get the libraries open as soon as possible? *[duplicate question]*
17. Lunch Program Debacle -
- 1) When was it known that money was being lost in the lunch program? What has been the corrective action?
  - 2) Why was no one held responsible? What will be the corrective action?
  - 3) If an employee is knowledgeable of a financial issue or is unsure - does the town of North Andover have a place that an employee can turn to, that will take action if necessary? As apparently an employee could not turn to the School Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent was ineffective.

18. We almost had a the removal of trash pickup services. An employee of the school system was writing opinions of what the schools "need" and highly in favor of taking away services. This person could not vote as she was not a citizen of the USA. Is there anyway to keep our town governments/state government from entertaining any agenda they (non voting, non citizens) may wish to push forward?
19. Why does the state allow for wasteful spending on extravagant schools like North Andovers - with TVs, etc. that have lower student capacities than the ones they replace?
20. If the MCAS tests are the standard, why do we have redundancy by having the NEASC? The NEASC seems to be more a "feel good" standard rather than a real standard of measure. Many overrides seem to try to justify themselves because of NEASC yet state MCAS and the states website appear to show no problem in the schools. Why are we paying for NEASC accreditation? How much is this costing the towns/state?
21. The school department expends significant per student funds, yet we still have problems such As overcrowding, no librarians, etc. At the same time, private schools are able to deliver excellent educational services for approximately the same per pupil expenditure. Wouldn't we be better off to give the funding directly to the students / parents (i.e. a voucher system) and let them choose the best school for their needs? Why don't we let the town residents decide, at town meeting, if we would prefer a voucher system.

### **Questions for Town Manager and Board of Selectmen**

1. Does the town of North Andover tax to 100% of our levy limit? If not, what percent of the levy limit do we tax, and what factors are considered when we decide how much to tax?
2. As you well know, at Town Meeting many people don't know the issues and they take a long time asking the same or similar questions over and over. In addition, many groups take a long time making presentations that most people don't want to see or hear. Prior to Town Meeting, couldn't we have one or more meetings where groups that want to make presentations can do so, and the people that want to hear the presentations can listen? Or couldn't something be put together like we see from the league of women voters? The information can be put in the papers, distributed by email, and/or sent to every household.
3. Public sector pension benefits and state pension liabilities are out of control - at all levels but especially at the state level. We also regularly hear news reports of individuals who game the pension system. What is being done to make public sector benefits - especially pension benefits - more like private sector pension benefits? What is being done to reduce gaming of the pensions system?
4. Why is our commercial tax rate so low, given we need the revenue, we are very low compared with most other towns. I don't buy the excuse that it will inhibit attracting businesses to town. Staples, Kohl's, Stop and Shop etc.. are all national, large, and want the revenue even if it costs them the going rate they are paying in other towns. It would provide much needed revenue with little downside, except for a few small businesses perhaps and they won't move either. North Andover is a very attractive town to bring a business, evidenced by the recent

development of rt. 114. Three large drug stores within a stone's throw of one another shows, to me, at least, that we must be spending a lot of money with these businesses. Let them pay their fare share, not just the homeowners. So why so low?

5. What plans have been made to re-pave Rte. 114 and Rte. 125 through North Andover?
6. In 1996 North Andover targeted Royal Crest Apartments and Brooks School as not paying enough taxes to cover the cost of educating the children who reside there. Since then several other apartment complexes have been developed. What is the rate that these dwellings are taxed for the schools?
7. Brooks School said that offering their ice skating rink on Sunday evenings from 5:00 to 7:00 at a charge of \$2 per person was payment enough for their teacher's children to be educated by N.A. Public Schools. And we agreed. How can that be? Can the School Committee share those precise facts and figures with us?
8. How come, after describing in no uncertain terms the unmitigated disaster it would be if we didn't support the override to provide \$1.3m to the schools, and after successfully persuading the townspeople that there were no other options, the Board of Selectmen, just a few weeks later, was able to 'sweeten the offer' to the school department to relinquish the Bradford School for the Police Department by offering to build a new building at Atkinson, partially funded by \$1.3m left over from the Foster Farm fiasco? Why weren't the townspeople made aware of these funds before the override vote?
9. The June Override promised us....one F/T Program Coordinator for Senior Services, one F/T Coordinator for Youth Services, one F/T Librarian at Stevens Memorial Library and finally one F/T Police Officer. My question is....have these positions been filled and by whom were they filled? If they have not been filled why the delay and when can we expect them to be filled? Thank you.
10. To the Board of Selectmen: What good does it do to increase commercial development if they don't pay a fair share of property taxes? In the past several years, the BOS has significantly shifted the tax burden from businesses to residents. Residents have voted for commercial development in expectation of a boost in tax revenue that never seems to come. Businesses increase traffic and have other negative effects on surrounding residents. They should contribute to North Andover's bottom line too. *[duplicate of prior question]*
11. The FY 08 Capital Budget included many large projects including a new police station at the Bradstreet School and perhaps an early education center. It has been stated that these projects can be accommodated within the operating budget and that no override will be required.  
budget guidelines as far back as FY02 and as recently as FY08 set the guideline to maintain debt service levels within the financial policy of 3 to 5% of net operating revenue. The most recent discussion of capital projects indicated that we could accommodate these projects with the current policy of 4-6%.  
The projects did not fit within the guidelines the guidelines were increased to accommodate the projects. A 1% increase in the guideline means shifting approximately \$650,000 from operating budgets to capital debt service. In recent years the Fincom recommended very lean CIP budgets to help alleviate some of the pressure on the operating budget associated with capital spending. If North

Andover is currently running below 6% or even 5% moving towards 6 % will have  
When compared to comparable communities the one area that North Andover  
spends more in their general fund is in debt service.

How will North Andover deal with the reduction in town services that will be  
required as a result of the capital spending increase? In light of the recent and  
ongoing increase in health insurance cost and significant increased in unfunded  
state mandates especially in special education how can North Andover afford to  
shift such a significant portion of its operating budget to capital projects. Even if  
we can get better control on these escalating costs through contract negotiations  
won't this increase the structural deficit we already have?

12. I want to know if there is interest in pursuing CULTURAL TOURISM in North Andover by any town residents. Since last Spring, I have been working with a gentleman from Somerville, Francis McGovern. He sees the possibility of building a cultural tourism business here. Mr. McGovern believes we can bring tourists to the "VALLEY OF THE POETS". He helped me present an idea to the Select Committee in early September to further this concept. Any monetary gain will, of course, NOT be seen overnight, but with a small but consistent effort, I believe this could build into a substantial funding mechanism for our area with little outlay of investment to realize the goal. Other cities and towns have done it ~ North Andover can too!
13. I am unhappy with the Town Meeting format of government. I believe it puts young families at a disadvantage. Everyone gets all worked up on narrow issues, and begs everyone to come to attend meetings that are too long and time consuming. I vote in every election, read ballot information ahead of time, but am completely frustrated with Town meeting. Is it really feasible to change the Town Meeting format??
14. Does budget for Public Safety, Youth Services, DPW, etc. have any correlation to the number of people using/benefiting from the programs, or the type of issues that come up? For example, if there are, on average, X serious crimes, and Y minor crimes inTown per year, and there are Z residents, a typical budget would be a certain amount. I want to assess that our budgets are not out of line with other communities, not only based on size of community, but also on other issues like how many people use them - or how many fires/crimes there are?
15. Chairman Xenakis has said that he wants to explore increasing access to Lake Cochichewick. Is there any possibility of asking private owners that have frontage on the lake, such as Rolling Ridge, North Andover Country Club and Brooks School to allow North Andover citizens to park there and access the lake through their property?
16. Please contrast the pros and cons of the 4 available forms of town/city Government (Open Town Meeting/ Representative Town Meeting /Mayor-Council/Town Manager-council) and discuss the suitability of each for a municipality the size of North Andover.
17. Can you put an article on the next town warrant to ask the town to lower the interest rate on senior citizens' deferred taxes?
18. The BOS has said that there's room for development at the upper end of route 125, but I've also heard that the town needs to extend the sewer line up there. Can we ask developers to help pay for an extension of the sewer line?
19. Good evening, Would you please respond to the following question:
  - a) What amount of North Andover taxes were not collected in 2006, 2005, and 2004?

- b) What portion of these amounts pertains to residential taxes versus commercial, and what portion relates to builders who have not paid taxes owed on land they own?
- c) What is the town of North Andover actively doing to pursue collection of unpaid taxes, and if the town is not pursuing the collection of these taxes, why not?
- c) If the expense of pursuing collection of unpaid taxes is prohibitive, which group or groups of panelists would be willing to provide leadership for formation of a volunteer group with relevant experience to pursue the collection of the unpaid taxes?
- d) Does the state provide any assistance/training/advice to aid towns in the collection of unpaid taxes?

### **Questions for State Elected Officials**

1. Every Massachusetts town seems to have a school budgeting issue to one degree or another. Besides the property tax cap which limits revenue collection, the local budgets are heavily impacted by the unfunded mandate of special education. Is there a plan for the state to pick up more, if not all, of this expense and give the towns some breathing room in their municipal budgets for funding regular education?
2. How often are our State Reps fighting for widening and maintaining North Andover state roads?
3. Why are the streets, roads and exit ramps of Massachusetts so filthy, sand never swept up on our state and local roads, and weeds in median strips never pulled?
4. Two years ago, you [Reps. And Senators] addressed this town and acknowledged that the state and federal-level funding to support government mandated Special Education and No Child Left Behind programs was insufficient to cover the growing need for these services. What have you done - and what can we expect will be done - to increase the funding received by the town that is much needed and deserved.
5. Like my fellow residents of North Andover, I pay the same rate of income taxes as the rest of Massachusetts' citizens. I pay more in property taxes than the majority of Mass homeowners. So why is it acceptable that my children receive so much less in state aid than children in other communities of equal wealth (like North Reading and Westford). I know the state is planning to eventually increase their contribution to North Andover, but that will come after my children have graduated from high school. Why aren't my children entitled to the same education as children in surrounding communities? Why can't the state do something NOW to help communities like North Andover reach the minimum acceptable level of education for regular ed students? My fifth grader still can't use the computers and thousands of books in his school library because they are all closed.
6. At Annual Town Meeting, two of our State Representatives stood before North Andover's Legislative Body, encouraging a favorable vote for zoning changes at Lucent. Part of the justification was to receive financial incentives from the State when zoning this area to a 40R. Since this time, newspaper articles appeared regarding the inability of the State to honor payment of this incentive. What, as our Representatives, are you doing to ensure the State pays this incentive to the Town of North Andover?
7. North Andover as a political district was split up and lumped with nearby cities and towns whose issues and interests are not the same as ours. Please explain

specifically how you are fighting for more funds for North Andover's sped students and how you are fighting for increased regular education spending for immediate relief, versus time you are spending on monetary issues in communities such as Lawrence.

8. The state policies regarding support for schools seem to favor larger or poorer communities. Therefore the school system puts a large burden on Towns like North Andover. This divides our residents and people feel forced to "take sides". We are a relatively affluent community, but senior citizens and less wealthy people feel they cannot afford what the school needs. Very few vehicles are in place for the wealthier to support the school system - therefore, they (and money they could have afforded to support overrides and such) leave for private schools. Can the "formula" for state aid be re-examined? Does the number of students in special ed come into the state "formula" at all?
9. Why are Massachusetts towns required to pay policemen to wave through traffic during roadside construction, often at overtime rates, when other states allow towns to hire lower paid employees to do the job?
10. Would you support raising the dollar amount that triggers the prevailing wage laws, so that towns have more flexibility to hire local contractors to complete smaller construction projects at lower cost?
11. What is the status of bills filed to help senior citizens pay real estate taxes?
12. I've read that lottery receipts are down, and this is where a lot of school funding comes from. I've also read that the governor proposes that the state give new income tax credits to homeowners, funded by expected casino profits. Do you support casino profits being used for tax credits, or do you support casino profits being used to better fund school mandates?

### **Questions for Finance Committee**

1. Why does the Town of North Andover continue to come up short in the town budget? Has it ever been considered to have an outside source assess the current spending and managing of the town funds?
2. Please explain what the stabilization fund is and what it's used for.
3. Finance committee meetings are not televised and are now often scheduled on the same night as school committee meetings. Can you post your minutes on the town website?
4. Can you explain what it means when the finance committee says we have a "structural deficit"?

### **Questions for All Panelists**

1. Would the state representatives, Board of Selectman, and the Superintendent please answer the following question, including sub-parts:
  - (a) Briefly, what formula is used for computing the amount of state funding North Andover schools receives from the state?
  - (b) Why does North Andover receive so much less state funding than other school districts?

- (c) What are you as our state representatives/Board of Selectmen/Superintendent doing to ensure that North Andover receives greater state funding in the future?
  - (d) What, if any, legislation has been or will be introduced that will enable North Andover schools to obtain more funding from the state?
  - (e) Please provide the citizens of North Andover with specific instructions tonight as to what we can DO to achieve our goal of obtaining more funding for the schools from the state (including additional state funding for special education).
2. What are North Andover's options for better managing the increased healthcare costs it incurs on behalf of its' employees (i.e, have other towns found a solution for this problem?) What is each of the groups onstage actively doing to attack this issue? Please give us specific instructions tonight (and on an ongoing basis)as to what we can do to support a solution on this issue.
  3. In Burlington and soon possibly Lexington, officials have included special education out-of-district costs as a separate item on the municipal budget. While it does not save money it does protect regular education from unexpected upward bumps in special education costs.(Boston globe article Oct. 21, 2007). Would N.A. consider this so that the costs are visible to the whole community?