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Getting organized: Campaign for \$7.2M override under way *Group hears how another community succeeded*

By David Still II

After a meeting that lasted more than six and a half hours, the rudiments of a committee to support the passage of November's override seem to be in place. Barnstable School Superintendent Andre Ravenelle said that many of those who arrived on time for the 4 p.m. start stayed through the bitter end at 10:45 Monday.

The meeting was open to any and all Barnstable residents interested in joining a campaign in support of the \$7.2 million tax levy limit override scheduled for Nov. 4.

Leading the meeting at the Osterville Baptist Church was Matt Wilson, a Reading resident who coordinated two successful campaigns earlier this year within seven weeks of one another. The first saw his town support \$54 million for a new high school on a debt exclusion and the second gained \$4.5 million for town and school operations through a permanent override. Wilson's overall message to the 20-plus people attending was that it can be done, but the effort needs to be focused.

Wilson told the group that the campaign in Reading started with four people, including himself, and that the 20-plus turnout for the first Barnstable meeting should be considered encouraging. Wilson said that the Reading efforts were guided by a core of about 15 people with about 250 volunteers.

Ravenelle was also encouraged by the numbers. He said that there were more people at this week's organizational meeting than were present during the final drive for the 2001 override campaign. That was a school-only override question seeking \$6.7 million, which failed by a 45 to 55 percent margin with 11,123 votes cast. The

35 percent turnout for that special election is expected to be exceeded in November, as there are a number of town council races of interest.

Wilson's profession is based in activism and advocacy as the director of the Toxics Action Center. This is the organization perhaps best known for its annual Dirty Dozen awards for polluters. Wilson visited Hyannis last December to present a Dirty Dozen Award to the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound for its opposition to the wind farm.

Wilson has volunteered his time and expertise thus far. In an interview Wednesday, Ravenelle said that if there's a decision to hire him for further advice, those consulting fees would be raised and paid for through the independent override committee. Wilson did bring with him Jay Rasku, organizing director for Toxics Action Center.

In Reading, the override push was supported through traditional campaign literature, a Web site, an informational video and testimonials from key public and civic leaders.

Reading also saw an organized campaign against the overrides, which used many of the same techniques in its opposition. In fact, the opposition group remains in place, providing a continuing update of its Web site criticizing the campaign leading to the passage of the override. According to copies of source documents on the opposition's Web site, the general override vote was supported with more than \$11,000 in campaign contributions.

Ravenelle to Step Back

While Ravenelle contacted and arranged for Wilson to attend Monday's meeting, he said he plans to take a step back from here on out.

As the campaign get in full swing, Ravenelle said that he will provide factual information on the effects of a successful or unsuccessful override vote.

Town Manager John Klimm said that he did not attend because he was not invited to the meeting and also because of restrictions on his involvement in anything resembling a political effort for the benefit of the town.

Beyond the restrictions placed upon public officials by the state Office of Political and Campaign Finance, Klimm and Assistant Town Manager Joellen Daley belong to the International City Manager's Association. Daley serves on the ICMA's national board.

Klimm said that the ICMA has strict regulations regarding participation in political campaigns.

Speaking for himself and for Daley, Klimm said, "We are absolutely prohibited from participating in any sort of campaign. It has to be an outside group."

There are also restrictions on the use of town resources, including buildings, office machinery and supplies. Town employees are restricted to participating on their own time and off town property.

Ravenelle said that literature from the Attorney General's office regarding these restrictions was distributed at the meeting so all involved would understand the limitations.

"It is important that we be real clear about this stuff," Klimm said in an interview Wednesday.

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