

Editorial

The numbers game

The winners and losers switched places this week in the game of local aid.

On Wednesday, the House and the Senate agreed to increase state aid to cities and towns in the FY08 budget by \$235.1 million, a 4.9 percent hike over last year. The major increases are coming to Chapter 70 funding for public schools and lottery aid.

The numbers that were released made people in the North Middlesex Regional School District very happy. According to state Sen. Robert Antonioni's office, under the joint resolution the district will receive \$271,908 over the amount proposed by Gov. Deval Patrick. It is clear that the residents in Ashby and Townsend should expect their proposed override figure to go down if the aid numbers are accepted in the final budget.

Unfortunately, Ashburnham and Westminster may see their override numbers go up as the state reduced their share of Chapter 70 by \$39,795.

One more step exists before these numbers are finalized — the Patrick must approve the budget. Lots of debate will take place between now and then, so the final takeaway from the state is still unclear. Nobody knows the final numbers for regional transportation reimbursement for special education, or circuit breaker reimbursements.

In a game of give and take it is hard to determine who will come away with the small amount of money that is out there.

Antonioni said three-quarters of the cities and towns received more money under the joint resolution than in the governor's proposal. He said these numbers accurately represent the new Chapter 70 formula that was developed last year.

"The numbers in the governor's budget came out flawed," Antonioni said. "I'm glad that we caught the error."

The full impact on Ashburnham and Westminster is yet to be known.

Antonioni is right when he says that school districts should be able to count on a consistent formula. So far this new formula hasn't provided that consistency.

The formula should get one more chance. Next year, if the numbers between the Legislature and the governor don't work together, there is little hope in trying to get a coherent budget passed in the local towns and school district until July, when a final state budget is passed.

Letters to the Editor

PETA encourage safety around baby animals

To the Editor:

Spring has sprung, and baby animals are exploring their big new world. Here's what to do if you spot a baby animal:

- Wait and watch. Most baby birds, rabbits, squirrels, deer, and other animals don't need humans' help—their parents are usually nearby.

- Baby birds with a half-inch or more of tail feathers are good to go. Unless they're in obvious danger, don't put them back in the nest—they will only hop out again. If necessary, place the bird on the lowest limb of a small tree or shrub.

- If the baby is featherless, gently put him back in his nest (your scent won't keep his parents away). Can't reach the nest? Make one from a berry basket, kitchen strainer, or small plastic container with holes punched in the bottom. Line it with shredded tissue, and hang it in a sheltered spot near the original nest.

- Never try to tame baby animals or keep them as "pets." It's against the law in most places and unfair to the animal, who needs to be with and learn from others of his own kind.

- If you see any baby animal whose mother has been killed, call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Your local humane society can probably provide their phone numbers.

For more tips on living with wildlife, visit www.HelpingWildlife.com.

Stephanie L. Boyles

Wildlife Biologist

Domestic Animal and Wildlife Rescue & Information Department

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

Recognizing another contributor

To the Editor:

Your recent editorial "200 Big Ones" does not tell the whole story. While correctly recognizing the Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust and Ashburnham officials and representatives you failed to give credit to the organization which is principally responsible for this important preservation.

It is the Ashburnham Conservation Trust, and in particular Mr. Gary Howland, that should be credited with having done the lion share of the work involved. While we are deeply appreciative of the efforts of other parties, it is only fair to recognize this local group for their efforts as well. Had it not been for ACT it is very likely that this important piece of land would have been developed.

Small grass roots groups such as ACT often times must partner with a larger organization such as Mount Grace Land Trust in order to avail themselves of their expertise and paid staff. Mount Grace has been and will continue to be a valuable ally in our pursuit to preserve open space in Ashburnham. They, as well as the town's Conservation Commission and enlightened farsighted officials, have made it possible for ACT to bring about the preservation of hundreds of acres for future generations.

I bring this to your attention so that the residents of Ashburnham and neighboring towns will recognize the important work that is being carried out by ACT. Also, I encourage them to learn more about ACT by attending the annual meeting on April 21, 2007 at the Overlook Middle School.

Sincerely,

Donald V. Lemay
Ashburnham

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COMMUNITY JOURNAL QUESTION OF THE WEEK

How do you prefer paying for government services?

Property taxes. Sales tax. Flat fee. Income taxes. I don't want to pay at all.

Cast your vote online at www.thecommunityjournal.com

Results of last week's question:

What are you paying more attention to?

The local budget processes. — 33% The 2008 presidential primaries. — 33%
The results of Dancing with the Stars. — 33% The Red Sox's bullpen.



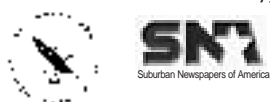
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