

Mayor Kimberley Driscoll's FYI SALEM

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A Quarterly Newsletter for the Citizens of Salem

February 2009



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Message from Mayor Kimberley Driscoll

Welcome to the sixth edition of *FYI Salem*.

It's been nice to take a quick breather from all of the snowy forecasts and stormy weather that has engulfed us this winter season and enjoy a mild Valentine weekend. Despite the harsh conditions, I hope you've had the chance to enjoy the snow and cold temperatures by ice skating at the new rink on Salem Common or sledding at one of the City's many parks.

In this month's edition you can read about the many things happening in our community. As you know by now, Salem and all communities throughout the Commonwealth have fallen victim to yet another round of budget reductions. We are working hard to make up a close to \$850,000 budget gap this fiscal year with our eyes on an expected \$2.4 million

gap next year. This will not be easy given the deep cuts to City personnel and services that we have already been forced to make over the last few years. But, our new motto is "no more whining", and as difficult as it is not to, we will move on and rise to the challenge once again.

One fun item you might be interested in, is Governor Patrick's call for citizens to vote on the scene that will appear on the next Massachusetts Quarter. And yes, you guessed it, Salem has two entries included on the Governor's list—the House of the Seven Gables and the Salem Maritime Historic Site. You can vote via email as many times as you want at www.mass.gov. So don't forget to cast at least one vote for your favorite Salem site!

Also, inside you'll find infor-

mation on my proposal to construct a new senior center on the corner of Boston and Bridge Streets. The current senior center facility is in horrible condition and we can no longer afford to delay addressing this issue, even during these difficult financial conditions. Our seniors deserve a new center and I am committed to building one.

Other articles highlight the City's new Preserve America designation, the \$500,000 state grant received to renovate Furlong Park, the City's long-term tax deal with the power plant, initiatives the City is considering to look at regionalizing services and my donation drive kicking off in style.

I hope you enjoy the information inside!

State Cuts Force City to Make Tough Decisions

At the end of January, the City of Salem received notification from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that due to the national economic downturn the state will be forced to cut \$128 million dollars in local aid payments to cities and towns this fiscal year, with further reductions of approximately \$350 million anticipated for next fiscal year. While this news was not totally unexpected, it certainly will have a major impact on municipal fi-

nances both short and long term. The City has received specific numbers on the proposed cuts from the Department of Revenue and the impact this fiscal year is an immediate reduction of \$836,631 in revenues to the City, with an anticipated reduction of \$2.4 million for next fiscal year which begins July 1st.

The City's immediate focus is dealing with the reductions that will impact this fiscal year, with an eye

toward implementing cost savings measures that can be carried over to what will be an even more challenging FY2010 budget process. With that in mind, the City has imposed a freeze on spending for all vacant full-time positions and non-essential expenditures. This action will save \$557,550 that can be applied to this year's local aid reduction. That will still leave us with a shortage of \$279,081 that will need to be raised or reduced prior to the

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City Receives \$500,000 to Renovate Furlong Park

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEA) awarded the City of Salem a \$500,000 Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant to completely renovate Furlong Park on Franklin Street in North Salem. \$500,000 is the maximum amount awarded through the PARC grant program and local officials are grateful to receive this funding.

Formerly known as the Urban Self-Help Program, PARC grants are available for the acquisition of land, as well as construction and renovation of property for park and outdoor recreation purposes such as athletic play fields, playgrounds and game courts.

Grants are offered on a competitive basis and pay at least half or up to 70 percent of a project's total cost depending upon the income level and other demographics of municipalities.

This grant will allow the City of Salem to make much needed, important improvements to Furlong Park. This waterfront park located on Franklin Street has so much potential, but has simply been neglected for far too long.

The monies received through this grant will fund the complete transformation of Furlong Park. The park renovations planned include erosion control measures, renovation of the little league baseball diamond, replace-

ment of the existing tot lot, renovation of the tennis court, construction of parking improvements, a new boat launch and waterfront trail and general improvements of amenities and landscaping.

Last year, the City of Salem was awarded \$474,000 through the Urban Self-Help Grant program to be used toward the creation of a new park on a remediated brownfield site at 15 Peabody Street in the Point Neighborhood. The City is in the process of issuing a Request For Proposals for the construction of this new park. Over the last two years, the City has received close to \$1 million through this program.

City of Salem Designated a Preserve America Community

Late last year, the City of Salem was honored when First Lady Laura Bush, Honorary Chair of the Preserve America initiative, designated it as one of the nation's newest Preserve America Communities.

The Preserve America initiative is a national program to encourage and support community efforts to preserve and enjoy America's priceless cultural and natural heritage resources. The goals of the initiative include a greater shared knowledge about the nation's past; strengthened regional identities and local pride; increased local participation in preserving the country's cultural and natural heritage assets; and support for the economic vitality of our communities.



This designation opens the door to many benefits for the City of Salem including grant dollars that otherwise would not be eligible to us.

The Preserve America program recognizes and designates communities which protect and celebrate their heritage, use their historic assets for economic development and community revitalization, and encourage people to experience and appreciate local historic resources. Since the program began, 650 communities throughout all 50 states have been designated.

Communities designated through the program receive national recognition for their efforts. Benefits include the right to use the

Preserve America logo on signs and promotional materials; eligibility for Preserve America Grants; notification to state tourism offices; and listing in a

Web-based directory that showcases Salem's preservation efforts and heritage tourism destinations. Preserve America Communities are also featured in National Register Travel Itineraries and in "Teaching With Historic Places" curricular materials created by the National Park Service.

The federal fiscal year 2008 budget requests \$10 million in grant funds for which designated Preserve America Communities may apply. Grants of \$20,000 to \$150,000 are awarded on a competitive, matching fund basis to help Preserve America designated communities develop sustainable management strategies and sound business practices for the continued preservation and use of their heritage assets. The grants support research, planning, marketing, interpretation, and training efforts.

For more information about the initiative and its programs, visit www.preserveamerica.gov.

New Trash and Recycling Regulations in Place

Weekly Recycling Pickup

Same day as your trash—no more guessing your pick-up date! Now you can recycle every week without worrying about having enough storage space for your recyclables.

All Cardboard Must Be Recycled

State regulations now require cardboard recycling (including all types of cardboard, thin as well as corrugated). All boxes must be flattened and in 3' by 3 bundles'.

Three Trash Barrels Per Household

Each household (apartment, condo, single-family house, etc) can put out no more than three barrels or trash bags not to exceed 35 gallons per week.

City Signs New Long-Term Tax Deal with Power Plant

The City of Salem has struck a multi-year tax agreement with Dominion Energy ensuring that the City of Salem will continue to receive \$4.75 million dollars annually for each of the next three years. The negotiated tax agreement will keep Dominion as the City's highest tax payer and help to provide fiscal stability at a time when state budget cuts are anticipated to local aid.

This is the second agreement the City has negotiated with Dominion Energy. Two years ago, an eight-year old property tax agreement with Salem Harbor Power Station expired. Following the expiration of that agreement, the City and Dominion agreed to a one year deal that increased annual payments to Salem by \$250,000. This was the first time in 10 years that the City had received any additional tax

revenues from the power plant. This new long-term agreement will maintain that \$250,000 annual increase for each of the next three years, for a total overall commitment of \$14.25 million dollars.

Salem Harbor Power Station is a coal burning power generation facility that has been in existence since the 1950's. Recently, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts instituted a new Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) regulation which requires the Salem Harbor Power Station to adhere to some of the strictest carbon emission standards in the nation. To date, Dominion has successfully met all of the RGGI standards and current plans are for the plant to be operational for the foreseeable future.



For FY2009, this agreement has enabled the City to restore several previously cut teaching positions in lower grade levels and will also allow local officials to replenish much needed reserves which were depleted in 2005. During these difficult financial times, this money will contribute positively to the overall fiscal health of our community and provide a safety net to municipal officials as they wrestle with likely state revenue shortfalls.

In finalizing this agreement, the City benefitted tremendously from assistance at the state level with Senate Majority Leader Fred Berry leading the way, along with help from both Representative John Keenan and Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles.

Salem Receives Grant for Bridge Street Gateway Study

The City of Salem was been awarded a \$75,000 Gateway Plus Action Grant (GPAG) administered by the state Department of Housing and Community Development. The GPAG is a new state program designed to support affordable housing and economic development opportunities for mixed-income communities across Massachusetts. A total of 18 cities will benefit from the \$1.35 million awarded through the program. Salem will receive \$75,000, the maximum available under the grant.

Gateway Plus grants are meant to provide assistance for neighborhood or downtown planning activities that expand housing opportunities and that support the revitalization of neighborhoods. The Bridge Street/Route 1A corridor from the Beverly/Salem Bridge to the in-



tersection of Washington Street was selected as the target area for developing a revitalization plan.

The goal of the Bridge Street Neck Revitalization Plan funded by this grant will be to stabilize and revitalize this mixed-use neighborhood, which serves as a major entrance corridor to the City of Salem and the downtown. The revitalization plan of this important entrance corridor will include an analysis of existing conditions, development of a vision for the neighborhood, adaptive-reuse strategies for foreclosed and abandoned properties, identification of sites (including land assembly) to create a broad range of housing opportunities, review of existing zoning and land use regulations, and recommendations to implement the

goals and objectives of the plan to achieve a vibrant neighborhood.

As part of the project, the City plans to outreach and encourage civic engagement to build and strengthen partnerships among the municipality, community-based organizations, and neighborhood residents. A working group comprised of neighborhood residents, businesses, and community-based organizations, as well as City leadership, will oversee the development of the plan. Stakeholder interviews will be held and include a broad cross section of interests and several public meetings will be held during the process. With the diversion of a large portion of traffic from Route 1A Bridge Street to the bypass road, the City has a significant opportunity to greatly improve the quality of life for this neighborhood by identifying City and private actions that can encourage village type economic development and housing in a pedestrian-oriented environment.

City Implements Strategies to Deal with Foreclosed Properties

As foreclosed and abandoned properties continue to increase throughout the Commonwealth and in Salem, the City has implemented strategies to track foreclosed properties, assist with providing resources and prevent additional foreclosures.

To manage this escalating problem, the City has created a tracking list of properties in foreclosure or in danger of foreclosure. If a foreclosure auction has been scheduled and/or a property is bank-owned, they are included on this list. Also, the City has mapped all of these properties on our geographic information system (GIS) system.

Items that are being monitored are as follows: status of the property (pre-foreclosure, foreclosure, or bank-owned); dates of default notices; scheduled auction dates; homeowner's name and contact information; date the City sent letter and resource information to homeowner; if the owner was assisted by the City's Housing Rehabilitation or First-Time Homebuyer Down Payment Programs; the Lender or bank owner and local broker with their contact information so that members of the City's Inspec-

tional Services Division and Police Department can contact the current owner regarding issues with vacant or abandoned properties.

In addition, the City is monitoring problems and complaints that arise with regard to a foreclosed or abandoned property such as a trash complaint, failure to remove snow or a sewage leak.



Not only is the City tracking foreclosed properties, but we are taking serious steps to educate and inform homeowners of programs and services available. Each property owner in the pre-foreclosure stage receives a personalized letter and flyer describing free foreclosure prevention programs and information about foreclosure rescue scams. Also, many homeowners receive a telephone call from City staff to ensure that they have received the information sent and to answer any questions or concerns. Information has also been posted on the City website at www.salem.com. Lastly, the City is also conducting outreach to renters in properties in danger of foreclosure to make sure they are aware of their rights.

The City is working on an Ordinance to regulate the maintenance and upkeep of

foreclosed and vacant properties. The proposed Ordinance will require all owners of vacant residential properties in foreclosure to register with the City; require all residential property owners, including lenders, trustees, and service companies, to properly maintain vacant and/or foreclosing properties; and regulate the maintenance of vacant and/or foreclosing residential properties in order to prevent blighted and unsecure residences.

In addition, the City recently started notifying abutters to foreclosed properties of the status of the homes next door so that neighbors can help keep a watch on these parcels. Homes that are vacant, particularly if an owner has walked away, can pose a nuisance to the neighborhood.

Recently, the Patrick Administration announced the availability of \$43.4 million for 39 communities in the Commonwealth to combat foreclosures and fortunately, the City of Salem is one of those 39 communities. This assistance, known as the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, provides funding to the City for such activities as down payment assistance, rehabilitation loans and grants, the purchase of foreclosed properties, housing development assistance and the demolition of blighted structures. The City expects this funding to be available in February.

Over the last couple of snow storms the City has received calls from many seniors, disabled residents and others searching for assistance with removing snow from their sidewalks, porches and driveways.

City Looking for Volunteers to Assist the Elderly

For many residents, especially seniors shoveling wet, heavy snow during a storm under icy and sometimes hazardous circumstances is unsafe. For this reason, a few years back the City developed a snow shoveling assistance program to assist our elderly and infirmed resi-



dents in locating youths and others in their neighborhoods willing to shovel snow from their driveways and sidewalks.

In prior years, the City has maintained a list of young people and others who could be called upon by residents in need of help with snow removal. This year, the City finds itself short on residents who have signed up to help. As such, we are calling on the community for help!

Anyone who chooses to take advantage of the program should be aware

that the City of Salem does not employ these individuals, but merely facilitates connecting people who need help with shoveling with people willing to do so and any agreement that is entered into is a private one. There could be a charge for the service as determined by the parties. The City keeps this list of snow shovelers as a courtesy to match residents in need with individuals willing to help. We can't always guarantee that there will be someone in your neighborhood to assist you. However, we will try our best to accommodate your request. To sign up to volunteer, please call (978) 744-0924.

Surveillance Cameras Installed in Downtown Salem

Surveillance cameras have been installed in Salem's downtown to enhance the City's public safety efforts.

To date, four cameras have been installed in the downtown. Two are placed on opposite ends of the Essex Street Pedestrian Mall, one is covering in and around the area of Old Town Hall and one is covering lower Lafayette and some of New Derby Street. One more camera is already planned for Washington Street to cover the intersection of New Derby and Norman Streets as they intersect with Washington Street. Town House Square is also being considered as a sixth and final location.

Each camera costs approximately \$12,000 including the costs of installation. All the cameras are wirelessly transmitted to the Police Department on Margin Street. The cost of the cameras and their installation was substantially funded through community policing grant dollars.

The City hopes that these cameras will enhance our public safety efforts within the busy downtown business district and act as a deterrent to unlawful behavior.

Two years ago, surveillance cameras were installed on the gazebo at Salem Common in response to issues related to

excessive noise, vandalism, loitering and destruction of City property. Since their installation, neighborhood complaints received by the City and problems occurring on the Common have decreased significantly.



Police will monitor the cameras at the Police Station. Another benefit of the cameras is their ability to "virtually zoom" after the fact, which can enhance a criminal investigation if one were to be reported. The Police Department expects the cameras to be valuable tools during October, especially this Halloween season.

City Considers Regionalizing Services

Salem is leading a growing effort on the North Shore to consider regionalizing key city services as a means to continue providing these offerings at the quality our residents have come to expect, but with the cost savings and efficiencies that taxpayers demand.

This idea was prompted by the fact that Salem has a vacancy in our Public Health Agent position and it immediately became clear that this was a perfect arena to start a regionalization dialogue as public health concerns surely do not end at the Salem city line. The Cities of Peabody and Beverly have expressed openness to the concept and Marblehead and Danvers have also joined in the conversation.

While regionalizing services is much easier said than done, public health officials in our communities already have a strong collaborative working relationship and much of the jurisdiction and enforcement authority granted to health officials is derived

from state statutes and regulatory codes which are synonymous between the communities. This, at the very least, has provided a strong starting point for this conversation to begin. Last month, municipal and Board of Health officials from the respective communities met and all are committed to exploring potential partnerships as a means to preserve, and hopefully expand, the current level of programs offered within our communities.

Salem is also working with Beverly, Danvers, Gloucester, Marblehead, Peabody and Swampscott on the possibility of strengthening public school ties. Salem is now the lead community on a grant application to the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for funding to help explore areas where we might combine forces without too much difficulty. Should people expect our discussions to end with a regional school district for Salem and Beverly and an end to the 110-year

Thanksgiving football game tradition? Certainly not.

But our communities will not allow that kind of hometown spirit to stop us to from exploring the possibility of merging back-office areas like human resources, professional development for teachers, and transportation – particularly transportation for special education students which often requires transport to neighboring districts.

Late last month, news from Beacon Hill that local aid would be cut this year and next, perhaps by as much as 10 percent, was not a shock to many in city halls throughout the state. We have been preparing and, as you can see, acting. But with municipal budgets already at barebones levels and expected local aid cuts on the way, cities must pick up the pace as we think outside the box, continue our work together to pursue these options and, as always, find ways to do more for the people – most likely with less.

Salem and Peabody Apply for Grant to Develop Boston/Main Street Corridor Plan

Salem, in collaboration with the City of Peabody has submitted an application for grant funding to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council on the development of a consistent corridor plan for Boston and Main Streets, which connect Salem and Peabody, respectively. Due to the fact that both Boston and Main Streets are main arterial roadways into

each cities downtown, it is essential that both cities work together to develop a consistent corridor plan.

The proposed project will analyze various land use issues and develop a shared plan for revitalization of the corridor through enhancement of existing retail areas, identification of hous-

ing/mixed use opportunities, and infrastructure improvements. Boston Street is a very important entrance corridor for the City of Salem and this technical assistance program provides an opportunity to approach its redevelopment on a regional basis.

The City of Salem Gains 499 in Challenge to U.S. Census Estimate

The City of Salem gained 499 people in its official population estimate as the result of a challenge submitted to the U.S. Census Bureau this September, a 1.22% increase to the estimate previously released by the Census Bureau in July.

Salem and 15 other municipalities around the Commonwealth challenged their official 2007 population estimates with technical assistance provided by the Population Estimates Program (PEP), a collaboration between the UMass Donahue Institute and Secretary of the Commonwealth's office. Statewide, the 16 challenges will add 21,295 persons to the Massachusetts estimates who were missed by the Census Bureau in their official 2007 population esti-

mate, including 9,001 in the City of Boston alone.

These successful municipal challenges represent the first returns on an investment that the state made last year to ensure that the official population estimate for the Commonwealth is as accurate as possible and that Massachusetts receives its fair share of the hundreds of billions of dollars in federal resources distributed using these estimates each year.

Conservative estimates suggest that Massachusetts stands to gain between \$2.5 and \$5 million per year in federal funding, or between \$7.5 and \$15 million between now and the 2010 Census, as a direct result of the program's efforts in its first year.

Other communities with successful challenges were Springfield, Worcester, Dartmouth, Concord, Waltham, Westfield, Milton, West Boylston, Fitchburg, Ludlow, North Adams, Beverly, and Dudley.

In the City of Salem, where the population estimate will now officially change from 40,922 to 41,421 for 2007, the gain is attributable to growth in the college dormitories group quarters population.

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO
CONTACT THE CITY
CLERK'S OFFICE
ANNUALLY FOR YOUR
CENSUS FORM**

City Creates "New Resident Tool Kit"

The City has created a "New Resident Tool Kit" to welcome new residents to the City and also inform them of pertinent City rules and regulations.

Included in the "tool kit" is information on the City's rules and regulations about trash/recycling pick-up, parking during snow emergencies and for neighborhood street sweep-

ing. In addition, information is included on voter registration and polling locations, public schools, parks/playgrounds and contact information for city departments and elected officials, among other things.

When you move somewhere new, it's nice to have a resource at your fingertips that not only provides information about the City, but also wel-

comes you. This is especially important given that some areas of Salem are home to very transient populations.

This resource will be available through the City's website at www.salem.com and will be distributed to newly registered voters by the City Clerk's Office.

Mayor Kicks-Off Donation Drive

During these difficult economic times which impact so many residents, Mayor Kimberley Driscoll has organized a donation drive to benefit charitable organizations in the City of Salem.

To kick-off the donation drive, Mayor Driscoll tended bar at Finz Seafood & Grill on Wednesday, January 29th from 5 pm to 7 pm. Over 150 people attended the fundraiser which raised over \$2,000 in tips and proceeds from two, one-night only cocktails. The money raised at this event was donated to Help for Abused Women and

Children (HAWC), a local domestic violence prevention organization.

During these very troubling economic times there are many individuals struggling to make ends meet. For those who can, we hope they consider making donations to help those in need.

There are four "drop-off" areas that have been designated throughout the City – City Hall at 93 Washington Street, City Hall Annex at 120 Wash-

ington Street, Salem Police Station at 95 Margin Street and Council on Aging at 5 Broad Street. Residents can donate non-perishable food items such as canned soup and vegetables, cereals and pasta as well as school materials such as pencils, pens and notebooks.



The donation drive will run through the end of March but all are encouraged to donate to these very necessary organizations year-round.

Vote for Salem to Appear on the Next Massachusetts Quarter

In a successor to the 50 States Quarters Program, Governor Patrick has been asked by the U.S. Mint to select one preferred and three alternate Massachusetts national sites to be featured on the reverse of a quarter. In doing so, he has compiled a list of possibilities and is asking for our help.

On his list, Governor Patrick has included two candidates in Salem on his list – the



House of the Seven Gables and Salem Maritime National Historic Site.

The voting is now open.

Please note that you can only

submit one site at a time, but you can vote as often as you would like until 5:00 p.m. February 26, 2009.

You can cast your vote electronically for one of the Salem sites by

visiting www.mass.gov. You can also vote by calling 1-800-227-MASS [6277].

The sites for Massachusetts include federally-recognized national parks or other national sites in the Commonwealth, including those appearing on the National Register of Historic Places, National Wildlife Refuges, and National Forests.



Vote for Salem early and often!

City Submits Stimulus Package “Wish List”

The City of Salem has prepared a stimulus package “wish list” of capital projects throughout the City. Late last year, the list was sent off to Governor Deval Patrick and Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray for their consideration.

The only way to ensure that projects in the City of Salem will be fully considered for funding from President-Elect Obama’s expected stimulus package is to get them in the queue. The ability to jump-start some long-awaited, important infrastructure improvements in Salem would have a huge impact on the local economy, provide jobs

for individuals during this difficult time and get projects that have been on the shelf for quite some time back on the drawing board.

The details of the stimulus package and the process in which to access the dollars are still a bit fuzzy, but we are hoping some of the funding will come our way.

The City has been told that all projects must be ready to break ground within 180 days of the bill filing to be eligible for funding – therefore the City must be ready to break ground at the end of June at the latest. Projects could include upgrades to public safety facilities,

cultural buildings, water/wastewater facilities and general government buildings as well as general infrastructure improvements. None of these details have been confirmed as of yet.

Contained in Governor Patrick’s initial list of federal stimulus projects released this month are the Blaney Street Wharf, South River Harbor Walk and Lafayette/Harbor/Washington Street intersection improvements. These projects total a little under \$13 million.

The complete costs of the projects submitted for the City of Salem are over \$180 million in total.

City Reaches Agreement with Police Superiors Union

The City of Salem has reached an agreement with the Police Superiors Officers Association. The settlement follows more than a year of productive negotiations and both sides are pleased that a fair agreement has been reached. The 3-year contract, effective July 1, 2007, expires on June 30, 2010.



The Police Superiors Officers Association represents 26 Sergeants, Lieutenants and Captains in the Salem Police Department.

Highlights of the settlement include health insurance employee contribution increases from 20% to 25% over the 3-year contract and 2% wage increase each

year of the contract.

In many ways, this contract mirrors the recent contract settlements with the Teachers, Fire Department and AFSCME. The Teachers, Fire Department and AFSCME agreements both include 2% annual wage increases and a 5% increase in the employee health insurance contribution over a 3-year contract term.

City Deals with Budget Cuts

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end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2009). In order to close this gap and get through Fiscal Year 2009 with a balanced operating budget, the City will need a combination of additional budget cuts which will likely mean the laying off of personnel, along with the use of existing reserves.

The City continues to work on and finalize a plan to formally address the

remaining budget gap and will submit that to the City Council at a future meeting. Unfortunately, just about every municipal department will be impacted by budget reductions as a means to deal with the mid-year local aid cut. Moving forward, Administration officials will communicate with the City Council, Department Heads and collective bargaining units to seek input on ways we might be able to work together to deal with budget impacts.

The City is hopeful that additional revenue options will exist for Fiscal Year 2010 and the full brunt of the local aid cutbacks will be diminished, however we likely will not know where matters stand until much later in the budget season. As such, at this point in time Administration officials are in the process of preparing an austere budget that hopes for the best, but plans for the worst.

Mayor Proposes to Construct New Senior Center

In Salem, building a new senior center has been at the center of political discussions for decades. Plan after plan has been debated with many locations identified from the city-owned Szetela Lane property to the former Bell Atlantic Telephone building on St. Peter Street. Unfortunately, rather than producing a new senior center facility these discussions ended where they began with political infighting and bewilderment.

On Thursday, February 5th Mayor Kimberley Driscoll held a meeting at the Council on Aging to update seniors and other interested members of the public on the City's efforts to build a new senior center. **At this meeting, Mayor Driscoll announced that she was recommending the City proceed with constructing a new Senior/Community Life Center, as part of a joint development at the intersection of Boston and Bridge Streets.**

Over two years ago following the narrow defeat of the last proposal to build a new center at the former St. Joseph's Church site, a Senior Center Committee was created "to investigate possible locations for a new senior center." For over a year a Committee, comprised of representatives from the City Council, the Administration, and

several senior advocacy groups met and reviewed site options, determined facility and programming requirements and solicited public opinion on possible center locations. Ultimately, the Committee unanimously adopted a report that identified the following three sites as "viable" options for a new senior center facility: city-owned land on Memorial Drive, city-owned land on Fort Avenue, and a private parcel located at the corner of Boston and Bridge Streets.

Following the work of the Committee, a final report was presented to the City Council. The Council accepted the report and recommended that the City conduct an extensive review of each site. That work has been completed and determined that the cost to build a new center on the two city-owned parcels exceeded \$7 million, while the cost to acquire a new center as part of a joint development at the intersection of Boston/Bridge equaled \$4.9 million. There is a \$2 million difference between the Willows sites and the recommended location. Further, the financing model the City is

utilizing requires an annual additional revenue stream to support any new debt associated with a new building. The Boston and Bridge Streets site will provide annual additional revenue from the real estate taxes paid by the new building, which will help offset the cost of the debt service associated with the new senior center.

Given the age of our present COA building, its lack of accessibility, coupled with the fact that it is comprised of only 15,000 square feet, spread out over three floors with extremely limited parking, the City can no longer afford to ignore this problem. Salem's seniors deserve a first class facility and the present center is deteriorating, thus hampering our ability to enhance or expand programming.

The City needs to deal with this issue head-on, even during these difficult financial times. This project requires City Council approval. They have scheduled a public hearing on Wednesday, February 25, 2009 on this topic. It's being held at the Senior Center at 6:30 p.m.

