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Ballot Question #1

Friends, earlier this month I spoke at a rally opposing Question #1, the proposed elimination of the income tax in Massachusetts. Since that time, the non-partisan Mass Taxpayers Foundation (www.masstaxpayers.org) has published a very informative analysis of the consequences cities and towns will face if Question 1 passes. I encourage everyone to read the analysis before you make your decision. I will be asking both the City Council and the School Committee to support a resolution in the next two weeks citing the opposition of Northampton's elected officials to Question 1. It is a reckless proposal, and I reiterate my opposition to Question 1.

Can I Vote? Voter Registration Deadline

As the Presidential election approaches, city offices are fielding more and more calls about voter registration. I want to share with you a resource available to check if you are registered to vote: www.CanIVote.org. The website has voter registration information for many states, including Massachusetts. This could be your first stop before calling the City Clerk's office to confirm your registration is in order. The website can confirm if there is a valid/active voter registration at your address. If there is more than one voter at the address, you may need to make a confirmation phone call to the City Clerk's office at 587-1291. The Voter Registration deadline is October 15, 2008. The City Clerk will keep her office open until 8:00 p.m. for the convenience of any last minute registrants. Please share this information with neighbors, to ensure that everyone who can be is registered to vote.

The Economy & Us

I know that we all have been hearing and reading in the news very upsetting information about the financial crisis in our country, and indeed, in the global community. Here in Northampton, we are preparing for what we expect will be a very serious budget year next year. We have

learned that state revenues are well down from expected levels, and I am preparing for the possibility of mid-year cuts coming from the Governor's office. **Let me be clear that no such proposal has yet come down from the Governor**, but I feel it is prudent for us to be prepared for the worst. Finance Director Chris Pile addressed city Department Heads at our last meeting about this very issue. We are asking all departments to keep a close eye on spending while this financial storm swirls around us, and to be prepared to reduce even further the spending we allocated and approved just four months ago. Northampton is in a better position than many communities to weather this storm; we have solid financial and accounting practices; our bond rating is the best possible rating for communities of our size; our community's homes are holding more of their values than those in other parts of the country so far. Just today, I participated in a conference call with Lt. Governor Murray and was able to get the most current assessment from the Governor of how we expect this financial crisis will affect our community. I will continue to work closely with our state government to minimize the effects of this financial crisis here in Northampton.

The Economy & You

I know that many neighbors are concerned about the upcoming winter heating season. I encourage people who might need heating assistance this year to contact CommunityAction of Franklin and Hampshire County at 1-800-370-0940 to get information about eligibility. Also, if you, a family member or neighbor may be eligible for property tax abatement, please contact the Assessors office or look at their website, <http://www.northamptonma.gov/assessor/FAQ/>. And First Call For Help is an invaluable resource - 582-4237 (or 1-800-339-7779). As other community resources become known to us, we will do our best to publicize them to the community. This will definitely be a season when we ask ourselves and our neighbors to keep a close eye on one another. There are many more challenging days ahead, but I truly believe that a community like Northampton with its many strengths and supports will pull together and ensure that we all come through the other side of this, together.

Northampton *cityschool*

I am attaching a press release describing the new program, NORTHAMPTON *cityschool*, that will launch on October 29th. This is a 9-week in-depth introduction to how your city government works and is modeled on the successful Citizens Police Academy. We often receive phone calls in my office which begin with "I'm not sure what office to call, but.", which made us think we can do a better job of getting information to people about the various city departments, what they do, and why. Anyone interested in participating may contact my office for a registration form. *Cityschool* will meet on Wednesday evenings from 6:00 - 8:00 beginning on October 29. For those who would like a broad introduction to the syllabus, but cannot commit to a 9-week

program, I will be presenting "*cityschool 101*" on Monday October 20th at the JFK Middle School Community Room. All are welcome to attend.

Upcoming Cultural and Arts Events

I would also like to take this opportunity to hold up some of the many upcoming cultural, community and arts events you might want to put on your calendar.

Robert Altman Film Festival The Arts Council is sponsoring a tribute series to the Director, kicking off with MASH at 6PM and a concert by The Feelies at 9PM on Friday, October 10, 2008. The Opening Night Concert is sponsored by WRSI and tickets are \$25 at TIX.com, Turn It Up in Northampton and Artifacts in Florence. The films and concert are separately ticketed events. Tribute passes (all 10 films) are available for \$30 at Pleasant Street Video and the Northampton Arts Council (Charge by phone 413-587-1269) Individual film tickets are \$7 at the door before the show only.

Paradise City Arts Festival

Columbus Day Weekend marks the 14th anniversary of the Paradise City Arts Festival, the most exhilarating and wide-ranging show of museum quality craft, art and sculpture in New England. Art and craft aficionados declare this Festival to be 'always fresh and vibrant, with the best selection anywhere'. It's no wonder AmericanStyle Magazine declared Paradise City 'truly innovative' and named it their #1 choice this year among all art and craft fairs in America! More information can be found at www.paradisecityarts.com

Northampton Independent Film Festival

This year's 14th annual festival, which will be held on **October, 24, 25 & 26, 2008**, will bring together some of the finest independent filmmakers from across the region and around the globe. The 2008 festival will feature more than 80 films, running the gamut from dramatic features to comedies and from shorts to documentaries. NIFF caters to filmgoers with an appetite for artistic adventure, intellectual discussion and originality. For more information, www.niff.org

Halloween Tricks and Treats

The Northampton Recreation Department teams up with Look Memorial Park to offer this Halloween event full of fun! Hayrides, Hay maze, Moon Slide, arts & crafts projects, face painting, pumpkin patches, food, refreshments, and more.

Halloween safety kit and sugar pumpkin included in entry fee for each child! For more information, www.northamptonma.gov/recreation

Pulaski Day Parade

Join me this Monday, Columbus Day, for the annual Pulaski Day Parade. We'll meet at St. John's Cantius Church at 11:00 am. We will march down to Pulaski Park where there will be a brief ceremony. It is one of my favorite local fall traditions.

Rag Shag Parade

Another favorite fall tradition is Florence's Rag Shag parade, which will be held Friday October 31 at 5:30 on Trinity Row in Florence. Don't miss the fun!

Pioneer Valley Access Network

Starting October 12th and every Sunday, PVAN will sponsor live shows which will be taped for airing on cable access stations with YOU as the performers! Dancers of all ages, jugglers, singers, stand-up comedians, artists of all stripes are invited on Sundays to the American Legion Hall, 63 Riverside Drive. Family & Kid shows start at 1:30; Music shows at 5:00. Food is available for a sliding scale donation from Manna and Food Not Bombs. Admission is \$4 adults; \$2 children 10 and under. For more information, contact World Renaissance Productions at 584-0436

Children's March For Peace

Saturday, October 25th, participants will meet at the corner of Gothic Street and Main Street and march down to the Fitzwilly's building, cross over, walk back up Main Street to Pulaski Park, cross Main Street again, and walk back to Gothic & Main. Participants are invited to share messages of peace.

Community Benefit Fundraiser

Earlier this summer, one of our Northampton High School students was seriously injured in a terrible accident. There will be a benefit Spaghetti Supper in support of the family at the Elks Lodge, 17 Spring Street in Florence, on Sunday November 23rd from 1:00 - 4:30 pm. Tickets are \$10, and there will also be raffles. For tickets and more information, please contact City Councilor Marianne LaBarge at 584-7937.

We are truly fortunate to live in a community with such a wealth of opportunities. It is certainly something I am grateful for as the season of Thanksgiving approaches. As always, please feel free to contact my office with any questions or concerns and I and my staff will do our best to answer them.

Clare

Mary Clare Higgins, Mayor