

## Select Board

**William Chabot**, Chairman

It's been a very interesting and challenging year for the Select Board, and a year that I would say I am very proud to have served. Your board has had to discuss and resolve many complicated issues that center around the routine quality of life in our town. Our town specifically has had to cope with a statewide \$3.2 billion dollar deficit—a deficit that all towns across the commonwealth were expected to accept and do whatever was necessary to keep their town functioning while weathering the storm. To the credit of the many volunteers that support our boards, as well as those employed either as a town employee or as a member of the Central Berkshire Regional School District, our town came through as a community and supported the initiatives and funding shortfalls that were in the best interest of the approximately 7,000 residents that make up the town of Dalton.

As it is often said about our town, we don't have many of the problems indicative of the big city. But though we may not have the issues that often plague them, we still have the fundamental concerns on how to provide a safe community, produce affordable housing, look after our schools that educate our children, promote a measure of growth and vitality, provide community programs for our youth, and look after our elderly. For this I want to thank all those involved in all areas of our town and its schools for handling a tough year and continuing to make Dalton the "Community of Choice" when it comes to raising a family and looking for a town that cares about its people.

As we forge ahead to the future, the challenge as I see it will be to look at ways to reduce the fiduciary impact on the individual homeowners without impacting our community's quality of life. In the last Annual Report two significant boards were chartered; the Dalton Community Development Commission and the Industrial Development Commission. These boards have been aggressively looking at ways to revitalize our town's businesses, promote community improvements and look at how we can attract more light industrial business to reduce the residential tax burden. Because of their efforts, the town was successful in obtaining a grant that will help improve the facades of our Main Street businesses. This should go a long way in restoring the charm associated with the major artery that leads through the heart of Dalton. The town is also looking forward to the completion of the new development called Silver Maple Farms. The revenue from these cluster houses under the town's newly passed Open Space Bylaw will provide help in mitigating some of the tax burden. In the area of community support, we are also nearing completion of our library and senior center study and anticipate moving ahead in the future to completing this project. These are only a few of the projects that stand out in our town, but they absolutely show we are moving toward the objectives of the Master Plan approved by the town when I first took office.

So though we continue to face some adverse financial circumstances at the state level, you can see the future of Dalton looks promising. The economy in Massachusetts is beginning to show signs of improvement and the unemployment rate throughout the

state continues to drop. This said no one believes we are out of the woods and recognize we must proceed with caution. Recent reports say the deficit is approximately \$1.2 to \$1.4 billion dollars for the upcoming year. With this in mind the Select Board is currently reviewing FY05 budgets and looking at ways to tighten our belts yet another year and wisely use our free cash and reserve funds that was borne on the backs of the taxpayer to offset the tax rate. This will ensure we continue to provide the quality of services our town residents have come to expect and still meet bond payment obligations. It is my hope that as the economy continues to improve, so will our ability as the Select Board to improve upon the services we provide to the town and its schools. I am confident we can do this and optimistic our current state of affairs will come to pass.

In closing, Thomas Jefferson once said, "The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government." We, the Dalton Select Board are committed to this ideal and continue to look forward to caring for and serving the town of Dalton. There is not a board member among us that believes we could do what we do alone. It takes many people, a lot of time and a lot of support from the town to make good government. All members of the Select Board have on many occasions taken the time to thank those who put in the extra time to support our town and I would once again like to extend my thanks. You help guide our decisions, you help guide our town, and you are why Dalton is a great place to live.