



EDUCATION411.ORG

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www.education411.org

EDUCATION411

is a volunteer, non-partisan citizen organization. Its mission is to celebrate Westwood's long tradition of educational excellence and to inform residents of key issues facing our public schools today and in the future.

Contact us at:

info@education411.org

Statements of the Candidates for Selectman

Education411.org recently invited each candidate for Selectman to provide a statement, not to exceed 1000 words, on the topic of public education. We provided the following non-exhaustive list of items for each candidate to consider discussing:

- impact of Westwood Station on the school system
- views on state aid to cities and towns for education
- thoughts on ways for the town to maintain the quality of its educational system
- view of the performance of the school administration
- challenges and opportunities for the system over the next 5 years and decade
- thoughts on the best qualities of the Westwood schools

We are delighted that each candidate responded to the invitation. The statements are reprinted as follows:

- Greg Agnew**page 2
Jason Leepage 5
Doug Obey.....page 8
Phil Shapiro.....page 10

We encourage citizens to continue to learn about each candidate. A candidate forum sponsored by the League of Women Voters (www.lwvwestwoodwalpole.org) is scheduled for **April 20**. Most importantly, vote on **April 29th**.

Community Forum

Education411 together with the Westwood Public Schools sponsored a Community Forum on the topic of "Safety in our Schools" on Tuesday March 11th. Slides shown at the event are available on our website at www.education411.org

Upcoming School Committee Meeting Dates

Thursday April 17th 7:30PM, High School Professional Development Room
Thursday May 22nd 7:30PM, High School Little Theater
Thursday June 12th, 7:30PM, High School Little Theater

STATEMENT OF GREG AGNEW

Thank you to Education411 for inviting me to share my views on Westwood's Public Schools and the challenges facing our school system.

My family moved to Westwood from Boston almost forty years ago. The decision to move to this community, in large part, was based on the town's character, charm, and school system. That same family commitment to move to Westwood and to be a part of this community remains strong today.

As a recent graduate of our School System, I can relate on a very current and experiential level. As a candidate for Selectman, I can attest that our Public School System is working. It is the strength of our town's school system that has made me, as well as my fellow classmates, so passionate about our hometown and committed to making Westwood a better place to live.

I am the only candidate for Selectman who has personally experienced the construction of our new high school. I've seen cutbacks in personnel, programs, services, and several property tax overrides. The myriad of issues we face in 2008 are of a different nature. Those challenges met in the past by our residents give us a foundation to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. There are no easy answers to the complex issues we face. There are only difficult choices and hard work standing before us. A new energy and leadership is required by all of us if we plan to continue our tradition of excellence.

State and local aid to our schools are quite simply not enough. As reported by Education411, Westwood receives 9.5% of the total school-operating budget from the state and funds the remaining 90.5% from property taxes. There is a gap in aid received between Westwood and other area towns. For example, there is already a \$3 Million gap between our town and the Medfield school system. This gap in aid is a result of a Department of Education formula based on property evaluations from local tax assessors. The gap in aid to Westwood is expected to close within 5 years. As the only candidate for Selectman to be elected as a member of Westwood's Democratic Town committee, I will advocate to close the gap in our state aid with our state legislature.

The MCAS as presently mandated serves more to stigmatize

than to improve the educational well being of our students. As the only candidate to have successfully taken and passed the MCAS, I believe state and local resources required in teaching students MCAS preparation could be better utilized. With contributions from our School Committee, I will advocate their input to our State Representative.

Projected revenue from Westwood Station may have a significant impact on lessening our property tax burden. In the final planned form, a project of this size and scope will require the utmost attention of all our residents and town officials. With our current economy, it will be several years before we can determine if this project will be successful. I share the concern regarding the recent determination of rental versus ownership of Westwood Station housing. Rentals allow the developers more flexibility in obtaining financing for the project; however, rentals will promote a volatile school population creating additional and alternative planning scenarios. To me, an additional challenge will be assimilating Westwood Station students to become contributing stakeholders of our school system and community.

It is frustrating to many of our residents to read of opposite decisions rendered by Town boards and committee's otherwise thought to be going in another direction. These decisions may cause an adverse reaction to planning already in place. In their open letter to the residents, the current Board of Selectman has made progress in keeping us informed of changes. I believe it is the responsibility of the Board of Selectman to take the lead and cross over with other elected boards, committee's, and town officials to provide us with current scheduled information. As Selectman, I will make government transparency the highest priority.

I am an advocate of exploring alternative energy use for our schools. I support working with the newly formed Environmental Committee, which seeks to reduce carbon emissions and conserve energy for our Town. Collaborating with the School and Environmental Committee, green roof techniques may have application on flat roofed schools reducing energy costs and carbon emissions.

I advocate "Education in our Environment". I believe in the education and support of programs using our open space to create stewardship of our natural resources. All of our schools are within safe walking distance to town owned open space. I will work with the School Committee and other volunteer organizations to

make this happen.

I support the Commonwealth Readiness Project. The goal of the project is to develop a blueprint for state action that will facilitate sweeping change in education. Student progression from early learning to high school, higher education, work, and society are imperative in a global environment. We must energize and foster the inclusion of all students in all programs and services. We must lessen the peer perceived talent gap. It is our responsibility to listen to our students, learn from their issues and lead with them to a common solution.

I propose the same for myself as I propose for our education system. I will listen to all of our residents, learn from their issues, and will lead with them to a common solution.

I would like to thank everyone for taking the time to read some of my views and perspectives. To the residents of Westwood, I thank you. I have personally benefited as a second-generation graduate of our school system.

For more information, please feel free to contact me at (781)-326-8944, or visit my website at www.gregagnew.com. I would appreciate your consideration and vote on April 29th, 2008.

STATEMENT OF JASON LEE

The community of Westwood takes great pride in its school system. Westwood is always considered a top tier school system in the Commonwealth as well as the nation. We are now afforded the opportunity to maintain and improve our excellent school system.

Westwood Station will provide great tax revenue to the town with an immediate injection of \$11.5M of which \$1M for general operation and \$3M for capital budget will be allocated to the school system. In addition, mitigation is in place for new incoming students from Westwood Station.

Consider these facts:

- Tax revenue from Westwood Station will decrease the likelihood for future Proposition 2 ½ Overrides.
- Mitigation funds are in place of \$6M for incoming students from Westwood Station.
- Westwood Station is designed to deter families with children.
- Studies show school age children from Westwood Station expected to be approximately 15-25 students.
- Westwood Station provided funds to balance the Town Budget for FY2009 (\$1.75M) and FY2010 (\$2.75M).

Westwood must continue to source funds from the town as state aid through educational programs are limited. In particular, Chapter 70 State Aid provides funding based on fiscal need and not on academic performance. Currently, the Chapter 70 state aid minimal target is 17.5% contribution funding and Westwood received 14% in FY2009 and even less in previous years, well below the minimal target. The Commonwealth recognizes Westwood is not receiving the target minimum and is taking the proper measures to achieve the target by FY2011.

The Westwood school system is highly regarded because of the efforts of the school administration. John Antonucci, Superintendent of Schools, and his staff have elevated the program, curriculum and public perception of the school system and the administration. They are to be commended for their efforts and endless hours on the job. The administration's mantra, "Leave no question unanswered" should be emulated throughout the Commonwealth.

The administration will be challenged in upcoming years as Westwood is preparing and facing the greatest population

bubble of middle school students. The Thurston Middle School is bursting at the seams and in need of an expansion to accommodate the influx of students. Funds from the Westwood Station will assist in the cost of the expansion for the build out of the cafeteria, addition of seven new modular classrooms and hiring two teachers.

Westwood must continue to properly fund and allocate the necessary resources to maintain and improve upon our excellent school system. The school system will be challenged financially today and for years to come. The community has always stood behind the quality of the school system and we must continue to do so by working together.

Westwood Station poses both great opportunity and challenges. Together as a community, Westwood will benefit with improved school systems, municipal services and controlled taxes. Now, more than ever, we need to elect a Selectman that has the experience, passion and dedication to take on the opportunities and challenges brought forth.

My background will prove to you that I am a perfect fit for the position at this crucial time in Westwood's growth. I offer you the experience that can deliver the results you want.

- As a parent of two precious daughters, I am active in the Downey Elementary School PTO and Westwood Elementary School Coalition (WESC.) Like most of you, I am invested in the future of our public school system.
- As a client partner for a consulting firm, commercial developer, and entrepreneur, I have the critical business background to ask the right questions, to demand the honest answers and anticipate possible issues with the town's local development projects.
- As a director of an industry trade association, I am a proven leader who can work collaboratively on several projects while balancing and respecting various viewpoints and interests.
- As a former technology consultant, I have the vision and know-how to make our town innovative, streamlined and capable of keeping up with the constant high-tech advances of the 21st century.

Belonging to a tight-knit community that cares so much about its children, its neighbors and its future is truly a blessing. We

work together so we can live together in this "W town" that has great schools, great location and, as we insiders know, great sense of community and so much more.

On April 29, please cast your vote in our town wide election. I hope you will do me, Jason Lee, the honor of representing you as Selectman of Westwood in the matters that are important to you and your family.

Sincerely,
Jason Lee
Vote Jason Lee for Selectman
www.VoteJasonLee.com

STATEMENT OF DOUG OBEY

To the residents of Westwood;

I have long been a fan of the Westwood School System. My wife and I and our three children moved to Westwood primarily because of the schools, wanting the best education for our children we could provide them. Unfortunately, at the time, we could not afford to buy a home in Westwood and ended up renting a home for almost six years until we could afford a home.

I can especially appreciate the educations my children received at the Westwood schools, having come from a different town. Their experience not only prepared them for excellent colleges but also gave them a well rounded education including many extracurricular activities. I will be forever indebted to the excellent teachers, guidance counselors and programs that the Westwood school system provided, that my children benefited from.

While being a fiscal conservative, I am still committed to making sure Westwood schools have the proper funding to continue to provide the incredible educations and positive environment for learning, that they do. It will take innovation and creativity on all of our parts, Selectman, School Committee Members, Administrators, Teachers and Parents to maintain the quality of Westwood's school system. Working together as a team will be paramount.

As a Selectman I will have the ability to lobby our legislators for much needed revenues for our schools as well as our town. We will also have to be creative in ways to increase our tax base and revenues without overriding Prop 2 1/2. Increasing property taxes are a problem across the state not just here in Westwood. A problem we must be sensitive to. The Westwood Station project is an excellent example of maximizing our town's resources. It will take better advantage of an ideal location, that for far too long hasn't been yielding much in the way of tax revenues to the town.

Encouraging business is another way to increase our tax base and revenues. Businesses pay taxes and use very few town services. As Selectman I can help coordinate and work with other boards to help make Westwood a more business friendly town.

We also have to be as efficient as we can in order to reduce expenses. An example of this would be to work toward joining the state GIC program to help reduce health insurance costs the town and town employees pay for. This May there will be a warrant article presented at town meeting mandating that town workers, upon retirement, apply for Medicare with the town helping to provide a supplemental policy that will save both the town and the retirees thousands of dollars each year. These types of efficiencies are essential to stretch our limited revenues as far as we can to maintain the high quality of services provided in Westwood.

Westwood's potential to stay ahead of the inflation that drives up our costs, is limited only by our imaginations. I will bring the ingenuity I've used in my personal and professional life to the Selectman's position and continue to find creative ways to reduce costs and increase revenues. That way we can maintain the quality of our school system that provides the educations our children deserve as well as the town providing the services we've come to expect that help provide the quality of life we all enjoy in Westwood.

My background and experience in finance and economics will assist me in helping the town, especially as we head into this recession that will impact our economy nationally as well as here in Westwood. The coming years will be challenging but with the right leadership we can keep Westwood going strong.

Doug Obey, Candidate for Selectman

www.DougObey.com

STATEMENT OF PHIL SHAPIRO

Dear Westwood Resident,

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on our school system. Thank you westwoodeducation411. My parents spent their entire careers as public school teachers, coaches and administrators. Jeannie and I attended public schools and she worked for years in public schools as a Speech Pathologist. I have a master's degree in education. I understand how important a school system is to any community. Our school system has been the focal point of the Westwood community for decades. It is the reason many of us live in Westwood. We do not have a town common or downtown district that serve as home for our civic and social engagement. Our Town Common, the thing that pulls us together and hosts our dialogue, is our schools. Our schools affect the value of our homes, the success of our children and the values of the new neighbors who will be joining us.

Because of Westwood's commitment to its schools we need to consider Westwood Station's impact on the quality of education in our town. I support Westwood Station. It presents a unique opportunity for our schools due to the annual tax revenues it will generate. However, it may also present substantial challenges if the number of students puts stress on the system. While there is mitigation to offset the operating cost of educating additional students it could create issues that are not covered by the program.

- There are no provisions for additional capital facilities for the school system.
- The Downey School is not sized or equipped to handle large numbers of additional elementary school students. This may require flexible and potentially expensive transportation strategies to bus students to schools that have capacity in grades that are full at the Downey.
- It is possible that the more mobile nature of a large population of apartment residents will result in higher costs per pupil.

One of the reasons that Westwood's schools are successful is the engagement of the town. My experience is that this is not a

matter of people participating when their children enter kindergarten and exiting with their youngest child's graduation. Many senior citizens, people without children, people with children in private schools, empty nesters, and others with no direct, immediate interest also strongly support the system. They want the children of their neighbors, of their relatives, and all the children in town to have a great school system. Openness, talent, a willingness to listen and the ability to analyze issues and make difficult decisions are the hallmarks of our system. I believe that our School Committee and Superintendent Antonucci and his team deserve high marks and have guided the system well.

Our challenges will continue regardless of the timing or size of the Westwood Station project. We need to face the challenges of the system and improve its ability to serve every child. Many public schools serve the brightest children and the children in need of the most intervention extremely well. The children in the middle are sometimes an unseen challenge and opportunity. The deployment of teaching talent across types of students in middle and high schools presents huge philosophical and practical challenges. We are not exempt from these issues. Dealing with under performing teachers is a challenge that Westwood has improved on greatly over the years. I have seen a dramatic improvement in the quality of the Thurston Middle School over the last 10 years.

I believe that our system or any system is only as good as the teachers in the classroom. Most of the teachers in the Westwood system are well educated, hard working and caring. They make the system work and are a great strength. The system is accepting and models moral approaches to problems. It requires civility and citizenship. While there are times when those values are challenged and it feels as though we are struggling, the grounding is ingrained and we always come back through a positive approach. Sports, theater, the arts and extra curricular activities of all types are done within the schools values and are seen as teaching opportunities. We do not sacrifice our standards for momentary success.

I served as chairman of the override for the Middle School expansion in the 1990's and I have had at least one child in the Westwood system for the last 15 years. When I was on the Finance Commission I worked with the schools to address capital issues and to improve communication and cooperation between the schools and the town. When I chaired the Business Development Advisory Board our primary goal was to expand the tax base in order to allow us to fund the school

system and town services on a sustainable basis. My efforts and experience in these areas and my 20+ years of professional experience in public finance are why I feel confident that I can help build a sustainable financial future for Westwood and its schools.

These are some of my general thoughts about the system. Given that there are four candidates and we were offered 1000 word apiece I am stopping now. I would be happy get people's comments and to expand on these issues or address other topics over the next several weeks.

I would appreciate your support and your vote on April 29.

Education

M. B. A. Boston College
M. Ed. University of Maine/Orono
B. A. Amherst College

Town Experience

Elected Assessor (6 years, currently serving)
Long Range Financial Planning Comm. (current)
Chairman, Business Development Advisory Board (4 years)
Finance Commission (3 years, 1 year as Vice Chairman)

Professional Experience

Vice President and Chief Financial Officer-Babson College (2 1/2 years, current)
Managing Director, Head of the Boston Office- S&P Public Finance Bond Ratings (12 years)
Director of Finance & Development/CFO-MA Water Resources Authority (9 years)
Adjunct Lecturer (Public Finance) Kennedy School of Government (3 years)

Local Volunteer Activities

Board of Trustees, BID Hospital Needham (3 years, current)
Board of Directors, Westwood Land Trust
Soccer coach, softball coach

Thank you very much.
Phil Shapiro