

## NEEDHAM

### Demographics -2000 Census

- Total population - 28,911
- 12.70 sq. miles
- 2.185 people per sq. mile
- 94.8 % white
- .7 % black
- 3.5 % Asian
- 1.2 % Hispanic or Latino
- 96.4 % high school grad or higher, 64.9% bachelor's degree or higher
- Median household income - \$88,079
- Median family income - \$107,570
- Median house value - \$385,600
- Total Registered        19,520
- Democrats                6,297    32.3%
- Republicans             3,915    20.1%
- Other parties             99        0.5%
- Unenrolled Voters      9,209    47.2%

### History

- Suburb right outside Boston, bordering the city of Newton
- Located on rocky uplands within a loop of the Charles River causing slow development
- Development began in the 1640s when people from Dedham first explored the area thinking they had discovered gold
- Settlers began to graze cattle in the 1680s
- 1681-land that is now Needham and Wellesley was purchased from tribal leader William Nehoiden for 10 pounds in money, 50 acres in land, and 40 shillings in corn
- Wellesley became own town 1881
- Colonial history- Poor farming community off of the main roads
- Settlers were very wary of Boston- appealed to general court in Boston to get the town excused from sending a rep.
- Town repeatedly was fined for over 100 years, got them revoked
- 40 % of our men served in wars against the French and Indian raiders
- Town of Needham was incorporated in November 5, 1711 with 50 families
- Named after town close by to Dedham in England
- Revolutionary War- 185 men fought in battle of April 19, 1775, 5 deaths
- The townspeople were mostly farmers and dairying and horticulture until 1850s when English knitter William Carter came and started a worldwide knit goods business (William Carter Corporation)
- From 1859-1870s was the Back Bay fill in which large amounts of Needham land was taken by train to fill in Back Bay in Boston, left behind desert plain → one of the first industrial parks in 1950
- Easy MBTA access to Boston Construction of route 128 in 1931 (1<sup>st</sup> highway) opened Needham up to development
- In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became a resort area for wealthy Bostonians
- Housing development and knitted underwear were the foundation of Needham's economy into the 20<sup>th</sup> century

## Form of Government

- Representative Town meeting format, Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator
- Town Meeting form since inc. of Needham (almost 300 years little change)
- First recorded elections of a moderator are for the meetings on May 21, 1714 and March 6, 1716
- Captain Robert Cook was chosen both times, presided over 67 town meetings prior to 1725
- March 13, 1780 it was voted to choose the town clerk and first Selectman
- 1803- clerk was paid \$4.36
- Many strange warrants: May 20, 1745- Warrant on article titled “To see what the Town will do with their Law Book that Captain Robert Fuller keeps in his hands” and March 19 1779 for money to “be put into the hands of the selectmen to be used at their discretion: To help Zebediah Pratt to his eye sight again” – had been injured in service of the town, alarm man from Lexington.
- 266 Town meeting members by precinct
- 252 are elected- 1/3 elected each year for 3-year term
- Members-at-Large (14): 1 town clerk  
1 Moderator  
5 Selectmen  
7 Chairpersons: Board of Assessors, Planning Board, School Committee, Board of Health, Library Trustees, Memorial Park Trustees, Park and Recreation Commission
- Held annually on the first Monday in May at 7:30 PM continues next Wednesdays and Mondays until all Warrants have been acted on – transaction of business
- Also held annually on 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday in April for elections
- Special town meetings may be called by selectmen at any time
- All Town Meetings are notified by posting notices in at least 20 places at least 7 days in advance or 14 days before a special town meeting
- Town Clerk also mails a copy of the warrant and notification of the meeting 7 days in advance
- Broadcast of meetings on local TV station, synopsis of meeting in Needham Times
- Quorum: A simple majority of Town Meeting Members
- Any resident may speak, open to public, usually average 215 residents in addition to town meeting members

## Budget

- Very important issue
- For fiscal year of 2006 spending requests totaled \$99,881,393 for town and school combined
- Budget was \$87,729,767 for 2006
- Town had 4% increase in revenue from taxes in 2006
- Trying to adjust the budget to allow for less overspending

## Comparison to Athens

- 40,000 citizens in Athens vs. 19,520 in Needham
- About 6,000 would typically go to the ekklesia
- 500 go to the town meetings in Needham
- 500 people vote at the boule
- 266 people vote at town meeting
- Similar with representatives by tribe in Athens and town meeting member representatives by precinct

### Comparison to Saratoga Springs

- 26,186 people living in Saratoga Springs- city with mayor
- Saratoga Springs had similar issues of going over budget

### Conclusion

- Needham has an impressive history, is very caught up with tradition
- Given Needham's post WWII economic growth and current budget/spending problems, it is clear that Needham is having problems handling its economy in a beneficial and productive way.
- The town meeting and board of selectman form of government may be stifling Needham's growth. Town meetings work when there is major involvement from the citizens of a town, and there is very little locally political involvement in Needham. Needham needs a stronger executive branch to go along with these town meetings to insure that good decisions are being made and that the town will have a successful future.