

Minority Statement of The Pilot Comparative Impact Study
Presentation by Bob Berman
March 23, 2006

Hello, my name is Bob Berman, I am the Chair of the PILOT Study Committee. Those of you who have been following our committee may be wondering why I am not chairing this meeting tonight. I proposed that the Vice Chair run this forum at our meeting this past Tuesday night because I felt very uncomfortable chairing a meeting in which we as a committee were going to present biased data as a "draft report" of the Committee.

I speak tonight on behalf of my fellow committee members, Jim Palmer, who unfortunately could not be here with us tonight, Wes Ritchie, and Dawn Harkness. We as a minority of the committee do not by any means agree on all issues, but the one thing we are in agreement about is that the entire committee should have had an opportunity to review and discuss the data that was presented tonight before it was presented.

The full committee including each member of this minority group, received this extensively large collection of data titled the "draft report" just one week ago tonight. At that time the full committee came to a verbal agreement that we would discuss the draft report and would not take any committee position on it for at least two weeks to allow for all members of the committee to express comments and concerns regarding the data. We were then told just two nights ago by the majority members of this committee that they would be presenting the data "as is" to you all tonight. While some sections of the data have been discussed amongst the committee during the course of our work, albeit with little debate and discussion, there is information in the report that has never been discussed by our committee. We feel that each piece of data that this committee presents is worthy of discussion and debate, but much of the data never had that opportunity.

There are several problems with the "draft report" as written. Just this past Tuesday, a member of the majority side of this committee stated in an open, televised meeting, that they went out and found data to backup what they wanted to show. It is our interpretation that the committee's charge from Town meeting was to gather unbiased data so that the town could make important decisions on very important issues that affect a great deal of people in Framingham. As you can now clearly see, the majority side of this committee has continually, and admittedly, disregarded this. In fact, we believe that the majority has ignored the will of town meeting and prepared a "draft report" that does a disservice to the town of Framingham and demonstrates a lack of respect to the Town Meeting Members who are expecting an unbiased, fact-based impact study about the impact of social services in Framingham.

We, the minority of the committee, have several major concerns about the data presented in the "draft report". Although we did not have the opportunity to discuss them in a committee meeting, we want to address just a few examples with you tonight

1. Similar to this draft report in front of you tonight, we feel that the data included in the "draft report" put together by the "Property and Income" working group was statistically flawed from the start. It should come to the surprise of nobody in this room that values of downtown Framingham properties grow at a smaller rate than those in other sections of the town. In their report, the working group analyzed 36 social service properties, the majority of which are located within a short walking distance of where we are meeting right now. It is only common sense that by heavily weighing properties from the downtown area, we are bound to see an overall average increase lower than the rest of the community as a whole. They have now used that flawed data to imply that social service properties are dragging down property values in the town, an assertion that has not been proven by the data included in the report.

The Property and Income working group created a thirty-some odd page report, sent it to the entire committee on a Friday, and voted on the next Tuesday, just a few days later, to adopt it with little to no discussion. Each of the members of this minority report pleaded for just one

additional week to review the data so that we could have an informed discussion, but we were told by a member of the committee that there would be serious emotional damage to those who created it if we had to wait one week to discuss and adopt it. The majority group, with the obvious majority of the votes, then voted to adopt it with little regard to the opinions of the entire committee.

2. There is a great deal of data included in the Draft Report that is just simply irrelevant to our charge. While it may be interesting to note that Lynn and Malden get much higher CDBG funds per capita than Framingham, we don't see any relevance to the impact of Social Services in Framingham. It is also fascinating that the overall number of arrests in Framingham went down 14% between 2000 and 2004, but what does that tell us about social services in Framingham? Nothing at all.

The majority of this committee has failed to associate much of the information they have gathered with the impact of social services in Framingham. What the majority of the committee has done is present unanalyzed data to show trends and estimations in property values, income and tax rate in Framingham. They have not demonstrated that this information presented has any finite relationship to what we are all here for, and for that we are disappointed.

3. Finally, a major section of the majority "Draft Report" document focuses on singling out the three largest social service agencies in Framingham (SMOC, Advocates and Wayside) for particular scrutiny. Not only is the data in this section flawed, but the PILOT Study Committee was explicitly warned by Town Counsel not to take the approach of treating any one agency different from any other. All of the agencies that we are researching must be treated equally and fairly. We should not single out any of the agencies because we don't like what they do or because they may have the largest revenue..

This is not the first time that the majority of this committee has ignored the advice of Town Counsel, a practice that we are concerned about for obvious reasons.

In conclusion, we are clearly a divided committee. The majority group has gathered and presented data which admittedly supported preconceived arguments about social services, and then argued that we, the minority, should have gotten data which supported ours, for whatever that means. We disagree entirely with that. We have just in the last few days begun discussing a minority report that, if need be, we will present to the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting. The minority report will contain relevant, unbiased data that will help the Town of Framingham make some very important decisions in the future. It is important to note that this was not our plan all along, as we had hoped that the committee could work together and come up with a report that encompassed diverse opinions and viewpoints that mirror those of the great town that we live in and represent, but it became clear this week that the full committee was not interested in pursuing that. We will be working hard to present a report to the Town in the coming weeks. We look forward to bringing forth a report that is in the best interest of the Town of Framingham, not partisan, not biased, not judgmental pro or con-but what Town Meeting asked us to do.

Thank you very much for your time.