

FTR THIS WEEK EDITION – NEWSLETTER

All You Have Is Your Vote (This Thurs, Fri, & Sat)

Last week, members of TTA went to Superior Court to stop the Board of Canvassers' unprecedented abuse of power when it blocked resolutions from the FTR ballot not because the people who submitted them didn't follow the correct process, but because the Town Solicitor said somebody might file complaints if they were put on the ballot and won.

Unfortunately, with the short time period and the high bar for restraining orders, the judge wouldn't take action. Hopefully, when the case comes to a full hearing, we'll be able to revive the rule of law in Tiverton. Canvassers simply can't have the power to judge the content of resolutions without due process.

For now, it looks like **all you have is your vote**. Make sure you vote for Budget #2 for a 2.9% decrease in taxes and for the three elector resolutions that made it to the ballot at this month's FTR (see next page).

Early ("absentee") voting: Thursday and Friday, May 17 and 18, at Town Hall, 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

FTR: Saturday, May 19, at the high school, 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

State Increases Estimate for Gambling Revenue

Each November and May, experts estimate revenue for the state. For Tiverton's cut from Twin River, Budget #2 used the numbers that the Revenue Estimating Conference projected last November. Well, the May numbers are in, and Tiverton's take has *increased* to over \$1 million. That's another \$60,000 we can estimate *above* what Budget #2 requires.

More important is the trend. We're six months closer to opening day, and the state is *more* optimistic. That suggests less risk that the revenue will come in low.

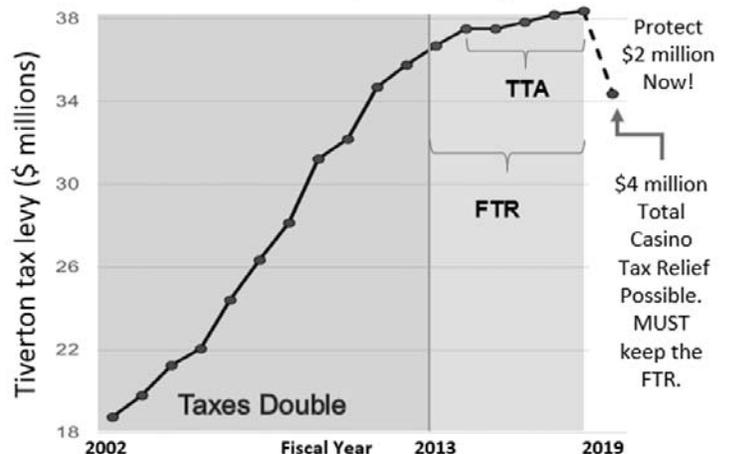
Control Your Taxes... While You Still Can

Most of the resolutions the Town Council's lawyer pressured the canvassers to block dealt with gambling revenue from the Twin Rivers casino. For example, one blocked resolution would simply have confirmed gambling money is a "payment" or "miscellaneous source of revenue" that the Home Rule Charter requires to be part of the budget process you control.

No doubt at the order of this Town Council, the solicitor has constructed a strange legal theory that pretends gambling revenue is somehow different. They couldn't have the FTR contradicting them! The council will do whatever it can to make sure that it decides what to do with that money, not you.

The council also insists it has the power to block all proposals put forward by the Charter Review Commission. You elected the CRC to protect the FTR and keep gambling revenue available for tax relief. Instead, the council has put forward proposals to completely eliminate the FTR, or at least make it much more difficult to use to control your taxes.

This might be your only opportunity to use the Casino money to lower your taxes.



The Three Resolutions That Survived

The Board of Canvassers may have blocked five of the eight resolutions that TTA members put forward on behalf of taxpayers, but three of them remain.

Petitioner Resolution 1. This resolution would ensure that money collected from the Pay as You Throw trash bags would go toward the fund to close the landfill. In theory, that's where the money will go anyway, but if the FTR doesn't vote to restrict it, the Town Council may decide to raid the account.

Petitioner Resolution 2. This resolution would ensure that only a maximum of 25% of any property sale in the Industrial Park would be restricted to pay to further develop the park. The Industrial Park is meant to broaden Tiverton's tax base while providing tax relief to current residents. Using no more than 25% of any sale for development helps the town make its investment more attractive to buyers while not short-changing the rest of us.

Petitioner Resolution 3. This resolution puts 10% of the revenue from the Real Estate Conveyance Tax ("stamp tax") toward open space in the town. This is another area in which the town doesn't appear to have been following the law. A financial town meeting in 1999 split the stamp tax, which is collected when property sells, 60:40 in favor of open space, but the practice has continued without further votes. Going forward, voters can choose to change the split, but during this period of high taxes, with casino money slated to arrive soon, this is a good year to direct more toward lowering the tax bill.

Correcting Myths About Budget #2 (2.9% Decrease)

Because everybody knows that taxes are too high in Tiverton, the people who want *more* taxes are trying to scare voters into choosing the town government's budget. The things they're saying around town and on social media are just not true.

Myth: *The town will slash important services or even go bankrupt if Twin Rivers doesn't open.*

Reality: "Bankruptcy" is just a scary word to make everybody think we have no choice but to pay more

taxes. The Home Rule Charter requires the town to maintain a 3% reserve fund. If the casino revenue comes in a little bit less than estimated, there will probably be some money in the reserves above the minimum that can be used. (We can document \$115,000 from state capital reimbursements, but more is very likely, especially with state revenue coming in high, this year, and the increased estimates for gambling revenue mentioned above.)

If casino revenue comes in very low, the council can vote to use some of its reserves. The town has enough to cover us even if we don't get a penny of revenue from the casino. Whatever the council uses, we can replenish the next year when the state has guaranteed \$3 million minimum in gambling revenue.

If we don't get a penny of casino revenue *and* there's a second catastrophe that also requires reserves to be spent, the town can hold a special referendum and ask voters if they're willing to cover the additional expenses. The cost for doing that and sending out the bills would be about \$15,000–20,000... or less than \$2 for an average household.

At the FTR this May, the town's budget would take \$876,925 more in taxes out of taxpayer hands than Budget #2. The worst that can happen if you choose Budget #2 — if *everything* goes wrong — is that you pay the extra when you know it's needed, instead of right now, when it probably won't be needed.

Myth: *Budget #2 recklessly uses gambling revenue with no plan if things go wrong.*

Reality: Both budgets rely on gambling revenue. Budget #2 uses the number provided by the state, while the Budget Committee used its own number. Supporters of Budget #1 have no reason to pick their number other than wanting more tax money, and they have no special plan if things go wrong.

Myth: *Budget #2 doesn't fund basic services and puts others (like paving) at risk.*

Reality: Budget #2 was written by a member of the Budget Committee who understands the reasons for funding plows, paving, emergency vehicles, and so on. All of those things will be funded with either budget, and most of them will be restricted so the Town Council won't be able to take them away in order to fund its own pet projects.