

## Retirement Board Profile: Framingham

2007 MAR - In addition to representing members before the state and federal governments, Association officials work closely with local leaders to represent retiree interests at the municipal level.

Association leaders rely heavily upon local retirement board members and staff to assist us on the ground at the municipal level. Beyond being our eyes and ears locally, retirement board members, especially the two elected members, are our go-to guys in terms of protecting the rights of local retirees.

Nowhere has that close relationship with local retirement board members been more important than in the Town of Framingham, where the Town Meeting is notoriously hostile towards public retirees.

Most recently, the Town Meeting rejected a bid to adopt the veteran's bonus benefit for accidental disability retirees.

In the lore of Association history, is the battle that ensued in Framingham during the 1998 effort to accept the new COLA law locally. At the time, COLA's had been paid on the first \$9,000 of one's pension, rather than the current \$12,000 base.

"Framingham is still governed by a town meeting, which has been notably difficult to deal with. In 1998, we nearly lost the article to raise the COLA base after it was rejected by town meeting," commented Association President Ralph White. "Due to our strong relationship with the retirement board members, as well as a very active group of local retirees, we were able to get it adopted at a special town meeting later in the year.

"Having an effective retirement board, who have a good understanding of the retirement law and are willing to fight for their members is key. Later this year, we hope that the board will be successful in bringing the Vets Bonus back before town meeting for a new vote."

## Largest Town

With over 67,000 residents, Framingham is the largest town in the Commonwealth. It is bordered by Southborough, Marlborough, Sherborn, Ashland, Natick, Wayland, and Sudbury, an area heavily populated by public retirees.

As stated above, the town is governed by town meeting, with a town manager running the daily operations. Democrat Karen Spilka is the state senator, while Pam Richardson and Tom Sannicandro, also Democrats, are the state representatives. Ed Markey represents the town in the US Congress.

Founded in 1700, Framingham quickly became a thriving mill town. The decline of manufacturing has been replaced by a number of high-tech industries. Beyond Framingham State College, the town also serves as the corporate home of Bose Corporation, Staples, Natural Microsystems, Perini, Lifeline, TJX, and Metrowest Medical Center.

The town also serves as a bedroom community for the thousands of residents who make the daily drive or take the commuter rail into Boston. However, with so many larger employers offering high-paying jobs locally, Framingham provides a good opportunity to work in the community.

## Active Board

With a town meeting priding itself in its activist stances, it is important that the Framingham Retirement Board remains vigilant and works well together for the benefit of the retired and active employees.

Town Accountant Richard Howarth, Jr. is ex officio member of the board and serves as its chairman. Howarth, who is a N. Grafton resident, has served on the Board for ten years, his entire tenure with the town. He previously worked for the town of Northbridge for a short time.

Mary Ellen Kelley is the town's chief financial officer, a position she has held for the past eighteen months. Kelley is the selectmen's appointee to the Board. She has nearly twenty years of previous service with the state and lives in Framingham.

Peter Rovinelli and Paul Barbieri are the Board's two elected members. They are each the Association's go-to guys in Framingham and are now working on bringing Chapter 157, the veterans bonus law, before Town Meeting for reconsideration.

Rovinelli, who has served on the Board for the past eleven years, is a Framingham fire lieutenant. He has been with the town for over eleven years and is a longtime resident.

Barbieri, an Ashland resident, is a Framingham fire captain, with over 26 years on the job. He was elected to the board eight years ago.

Rounding out the five member board is longtime local resident Sidney Lebewohl, who is a retired CPA. He has served on the board for thirty years and is one of the longest serving retirement board members in the state.

"We have a great board that works well together. Even though we each may represent different points of view at times, it never gets personal or contentious," said Rovinelli. "Fortunately, we also have a very dedicated and experienced staff. They serve our members well."

Working with the 1,446 active and 802 retired members on a daily basis is Executive Director Roberta Griffin. With nearly eighteen years with the Board, Griffin, who lives in Wayland, has a wealth of experience in dealing with the nuances of Chapter 32 (retirement law).

Alberta Pasciuti-Cummings is the Board's assistant director. She has seven years with Framingham and lives in the town.

Completing the three-member staff is Marianne Kenney, who serves as the administrative assistant. She is a Framingham resident and has

been with the board nine months.

Joined State Fund

Framingham is one of twenty-nine retirement systems which have chosen to place all of their retirement assets with the Commonwealth's Pension Reserves Investment Trust (PRIT) Fund.

As a PRIT participating system, all of Framingham's assets are invested by the Pension Reserve Investment Management (PRIM) Board, along with the state and teachers pension assets.

Framingham has just over \$195 million in assets, as of January 1, 2007. The investment return for 2006 was very strong, at 16.72% (See related story, page 1). Framingham is now approximately 70% funded.

Thomas Gibson is the board's legal counsel, while Sovereign Bank is the custodian.