

The Framingham Campaign



For Respect, Compassion, and Dignity for All Residents

Addressing Concerns about the Impact of Human Services On The Town Of Framingham

Introduction

Framingham is a town with a long history of welcoming immigrants and newcomers, dating back to the times when we welcomed Salem's persecuted. Built around factories and transportation, the town is made up of people from all economic backgrounds, including blue collar and middle class residents.

Framingham is also the long-established hub of the MetroWest Region. The Town boasts a vibrant economy and low unemployment. People from the region come to Framingham for our abundance of retail establishments, access to medical and social services, quality education and employment. Real estate values in Framingham as throughout the region have soared in the past few years.

Recently, a number of Framingham residents have expressed concern about the impact of human service programs on the Town of Framingham. They have been communicating their concerns through the press, at local town meetings, on web sites and list serves, and throughout the community.

In the interest of opening up a dialogue, fostering community and establishing an open exchange of communication, *The Framingham Campaign for Respect, Compassion and Dignity* here explores some of the concerns that have been raised by residents. As context to addressing concerns, we believe that all people have a right to live free of stigma, whether they are homeless, elderly, poor, disabled, or because of their race or ethnicity. We believe that given a real chance and with enough supports, people who are currently disadvantaged can improve their lives and the lives of their families. Furthermore, we believe that most disadvantaged people want to improve their situation and are working diligently to do so -- taking responsibility for themselves. We along with many others in our community also believe that how a community treats its most vulnerable members is a reflection of the morals and values of the whole community.

This is a living document, researched and written to provide a response to concerns that have been raised as well as additional sources of information where further insight can be found. We recognize that there may be times when new or additional information will be added while existing language or concepts may no longer be relevant.

1. **Concern:** There is general opposition to social services in the Town of Framingham.

Response:

We believe that the majority of people living in Framingham see human services as an asset to the community and its residents.

The people served in the community by social service agencies are receiving nutritional support, education programs, fuel assistance and programs for the elderly. They are receiving counseling and residential support, and services for the disabled. They are receiving employment services. They are receiving mental health and recovery services.

We believe that most people in Town whole-heartedly support programs such as Head Start, Meals on Wheels and mental health services. We believe that most even support shelters for families in

crisis, and for women and their children escaping domestic violence, mental health services, and group homes for people with developmental and other disabilities. Those opposed to the local social services agencies are generally limited to a small group of people who are angry with a couple of particular developments in the Town. They are defining the problem to include all social service agencies and the services and supports that they provide to the community. This small but vocal group has received substantial press coverage and attention at Town Meeting.

2. **Concern:** Social Services are a drain on the local economy.

Response:

Social service agencies are a major contributor to the local economy, not only as providers of needed services, but as active consumers and employers who live and spend their money here.

Two of the major social service agencies employ 426 tax-paying Framingham residents, and spend nearly \$13 million on their wages.¹ A third agency employs an additional 40 Framingham residents. These three agencies together purchased \$5.7 million of goods and services from Framingham businesses. And while some properties used in direct service to the community are not taxable under the law, these agencies do pay taxes on many of their properties, both leased and owned. For example, SMOC paid the Town of Framingham \$166,000 in taxes in fiscal year 2005.

In addition to the direct dollar support that agencies give the Town of Framingham, it is worth noting that as services are provided to local residents, many are able to stabilize their lives, obtain and hold employment, and become tax-paying members of the Framingham community.

3. **Concern:** Framingham experiences a significant loss of revenue due to the number of tax-exempt social service agency properties.

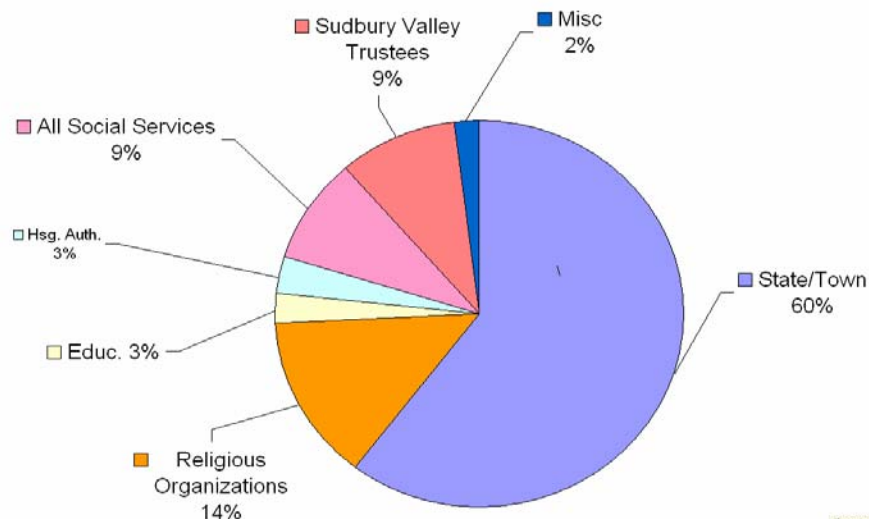
Response:

According to Chief Assessor Michael Flynn, “of the approximately 19,000 parcels in Framingham, less than 1% are owned by non-profits or charitable institutions that are not paying property taxes. The town is the largest tax-exempt property ownerⁱⁱ.”

Together, federal, state and local government owns 60% of Framingham’s tax-exempt properties. Religious organizations are the 2nd largest owner. This chart shows that social service agencies only account for about 9% of all tax exempt properties in Townⁱⁱⁱ.

The value of all social and human services tax-exempt property in Framingham is a combined total of approximately \$36 million, which is less than the value of a single corporate headquarter like

Framingham Tax Exempt Properties



Bose, Staples or TJXiv.

Human and Social Services agencies do pay taxes on many other properties that they own or lease – a fact that may not be widely known.

It is also perhaps necessary to point out that most social services are provided through federal and state funding, and these revenues, which make up a large portion of many agency budgets, cannot be used to pay local taxes.

4. **Concern:** Human Services drain the Public Education System.

Response:

The Framingham Public Schools are currently educating 8,299 children^v. Framingham Public Schools provides free education to all children who live in the Town and under Federal Law, all are equally entitled.

It is true that there are children in the public school system who live in family shelters, but this number is very small. In fact, there are currently 61 families living in social services shelters in Framingham with a total of 54 children in the school system. This represents only 0.6% of the total number of children in the district. The school district does receive a small amount of Federal money to help provide services for these children and their families.

Children come into the Framingham School district for any number of reasons. They should not be differentiated because their families are in crisis and living in temporary shelters, any more than because they are one of the more than 200 children living with grandparents as the primary care provider, or because they just moved into a new subdivision, one of the town's apartment buildings, or a single family that used to be occupied by an empty nester. Most children entering the Framingham Public Schools did not arrive here because of the social services available in the Town. If, however they or their families need community support, Framingham is an excellent place to live.

In many adolescent programs, the children served do not newly enter the Framingham Public School system or incur direct education costs to the Town. Children from other communities are transported back to their home community schools, or attend agency-run day treatment programs.

Many Framingham children also benefit from educationally based social service programs that draw on State and Federal money. Agencies provide childcare, Head Start programs, and after school care for many Framingham children, giving them a supportive learning environment.

Head Start services prepare children for successful entry into the public school system, reducing the need for costly special education services in the future, reducing the number of students repeating grades, and increasing graduation rates--which saves the Framingham school system considerable amounts of money. Research shows that children with high-quality early learning experiences are 40% less likely to need special education or be held back a grade.^{vi} Head Start also reduces future delinquency, substance abuse and other social problems that are costly to the community.

5. **Concern:** Social Services use essential town resources such as police and fire department services.

Response:

Traditionally, certain populations in a town are considered disproportionately large consumers of fire and police services – including the elderly, the school system, and local businesses.

Police calls are made for individuals and not for the store, agency, restaurant or other location

where they may be. Furthermore, social service agencies often mitigate the need for police as staff are on-site 24 hours a day, seven days a week and are the front-line of any crisis or emergency that may arise. Because of this, recipients of social services may in fact use fewer town resources than if they were not in care.

Social Services reduce family violence, whether helping families to cope or providing temporary shelter to women and children in crisis. Social Services help people to find jobs and lead productive lives. Social Services help people find affordable heating solutions so that they don't rely on solutions that can be a fire hazard. Social Services help people with addictions to stay sober and to lead healthy productive lives. Social Services provide children with activities after school so that they are not getting into trouble in the community. It's hard to quantify how beneficial these services are to our community and how they reduce the demands on our police and fire departments and other essential services. We only truly understand the impact when the services are cut and the problems of society are not addressed.

While all acknowledge that the Common Ground Shelter on Irving Street is a heavy user of police resources, it is important to note that there are issues and concerns that are unique to the emergency shelter program that allows people to stay there, regardless of drug or alcohol use. The shelter has a unique program – the people that use the shelter are, by definition, difficult to serve – most would be legally considered disabled, suffering from both substance abuse and mental health issues. Abstinence from drugs and alcohol is a requirement for all the other shelters in Town. The staff at the Common Ground Shelter has always worked closely with the Police Department and the Department of Corrections to minimize the community impact of the shelter, with many rules and protocols implemented^{vii}.

For better or worse, Framingham is the only Metrowest town that provides such emergency overnight shelter for individuals. Although there are problems with the shelter, the alternative – not having it at all – would be far worse as people would be subjected to the elements with potentially devastating consequences. In fact, the shelter was opened in cooperation with area clergy after a couple of people died in a fire while trying to stay warm.

6. **Concern:** The Town of Framingham is home to more than its share of Social Services Agencies.

Response:

According to MassInc's Economic Profile of the Non-Profit Sector, Middlesex County's per capita ratio (non-profits per 1,000 residents) is 3.8, the same as the state average. 53% of counties have a higher ratio of non-profit agencies per person than Middlesex. It is also worth noting that non-profits employ 13.4% of the total Massachusetts workforce.^{viii}

Framingham has always been the regional hub for the MetroWest area. Framingham has, by far, the largest population in the region at 66,910 residents. Framingham also has the highest density in the region at 2,664 persons per square mile according to the 2000 US Census^{ix}. The average density in MetroWest is 861 people per square mile.

Framingham is a large and racially and economically diverse community. The Census 2000 showed that while 20.2 percent of Framingham households earned \$100,000 or more per year, 22.2% of Framingham households earned less than \$25,000. Approximately one person in five is living with a disability.^x

The density of the Town, its economically diverse population, its function as a regional hub, its extensive commercial and business activity, and its place as a strong employment center make the Town a logical location for human service providers to offer access to social services.

It just makes sense that social services would be located where the population is concentrated and at the business, retail and service hub of the region.

Actually, Framingham ranks 14th among the 351 Massachusetts communities in overall population, and only 10th in hosting licensed residential facilities.^{xi}

7. **Concern:** Due to the large number of Social Service Agencies, Framingham is a magnet for people from other places who need services.

Response:

As the most populous community and the regional hub of the Metrowest area, Framingham benefits from an abundance of retail and commercial services, medical facilities, a State College, a regional vocational high school, and more. People come from beyond the Town's boundaries for retail shopping, medical services, commercial services, restaurants, school and employment. They come to Framingham to renew driver's license, to get to a post office with extended hours and more.

The Town's function as the regional hub also means that it is the natural location for social services to address the community's needs. To some extent, this includes the needs of people from our neighboring communities, which do not have the population, transportation access, medical services or access to jobs that we have in Framingham.

The town clearly benefits economically from being a regional hub.

As with all specialized services, if a geographic area can support only one such location, be it a school for the deaf, a hospital or a shelter, it makes sense to site it at the regional hub, where the densest population resides.

Thousands of Framingham residents benefit from social services, including nutrition programs, programs for the elderly, programs for people with disabilities and programs for children.

8. **Concern:** Group homes and program-enriched residences are a blemish to the community.

Response:

Social Service Agencies, some of whom have served the Framingham community for 25 or more years, take great pride in the maintenance of their properties. This commitment to upkeep continues even as state and federal rates provided for services lag behind the cost of inflation, and as funding is cut.

Social Service agencies have tackled some of the toughest buildings in the Town, and continue to invest in the community. *Advocates* has invested over \$2.9 million in Framingham properties, as discussed with the Board of Selectmen this past August.

SMOC has invested over \$22 million in properties in the Town of Framingham. This includes the acquisitions and substantial improvements in distressed, bank-owned and absentee landlord properties. One such property had been an illegal rooming house with no fire protection systems, and no property management, with 16 registered sex offenders in residence. Today, the same building houses 24 people who are in recovery, paying rent, and are receiving education and supports to help them lead productive, working, lives.

The majority of these investments were made with private dollars, with a great majority of the financing being derived from private sources, along with the leveraging of public dollars to improve the properties and preserve their affordability. This also included purchase, rehabilitating and reselling a variety of single family properties and duplexes for first time homeownership opportunities for Framingham residents.

Following is a before and after picture of one such building, bought and developed by a Framingham social service agency:



9. Concern: Siting Human Services programs in neighborhoods will cause property values to fall.

Response:

Property values are determined by a complex set of market forces. Numerous studies such as those referenced^{xii} have shown that property values are not affected by proximity to specialized or designated housing. These studies show that the development of affordable housing, including residential care facilities and supportive housing, will not lower the values of abutting and neighboring properties.

Some opponents have made the assumption that property values will decline based on the presumption that these buildings will be poorly managed and maintained. Yet the human services agencies in Framingham that manage low-income and supportive housing and services have taken properties, many in need of major renovation and repair, and have invested millions of dollars in property improvements. They have shown, for decades that they are committed to maintaining their properties well, whether they are leased or owned. These properties have had a positive impact on the environment of their neighborhoods.

10. Concern: People living in residential recovery programs present a threat to residential neighborhoods.

Response:

Group and residential recovery homes have been located in Framingham's residential neighborhoods for decades without presenting a threat. Neighbors have stood up to publicly state this fact – most people could not distinguish the group home from its surrounding single family homes. Framingham's violent crime rate is the same as that for Massachusetts and well below the national average and according to police chief Steven Carl, the downtown area is safer than it was ten years ago.^{xiii}

It is true that addiction is a public safety as well as a public health problem. This issue affects every community in the United States and requires a concentrated and coordinated response. Chemical addiction is a disease and affects people from all walks of life – they are our friends, our family and our co-workers. As a medical condition, substance dependency can be treated. Federal and State cutbacks for treatment, including the de-funding of detox facilities that once provided services for 1,100 people each year here in the MetroWest area, are a major contributor to the problem. MetroWest is one of six human service regions for state government and it is the only region that does not have a detox. Currently, the State legislature is developing a spending plan that would allocate additional funding for substance abuse services -- some of which may go to funding a detox in the Framingham area.

We must support expanded treatment and assist people with addictions to lead sober and productive lives. Studies have proven that substance abuse treatment works. “The Mass. Bureau of Substance Abuse Services promotes an integrated, consumer-focused continuum of substance abuse services that is responsive to the public health prevention and treatment needs of individuals, families and communities and is committed to quality, availability and accessibility”^{xiv}.

Residential treatment also leads to increased levels of employment. A 1999 study of over 6,000 individuals in treatment by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health shows that only 5% of the clients new to residential programs in Massachusetts reported full or part-time employment. At discharge, 41% were employed full or part-time^{xv}, as tax-paying contributors to the community.

Social service agencies that work with people at various stages of recovery understand the value of good and comprehensive programming, and the role of rules and regulations that support recovery. These same rules keep the neighborhood safe. Agencies are closely regulated by state and federal agencies, which dictate staffing levels and safety rules. Agencies also work closely with law enforcement and corrections to keep the community safe.

11. Concern: People with low incomes receive the majority of government subsidies for housing and other supports

Response:

Most people in fact benefit from government subsidies in one way or another – student loans, child tax credits, social security and more. The middle-class and the wealthy benefit from government subsidies far more than low-income people do. Federal tax deductions for homeowners are the single largest housing subsidy in the country.

In 2005, homeowner tax deductions will represent a \$89.4 billion tax subsidy. According to a Joint Congressional Commission on Taxation \$82.4% of this subsidy benefited families with annual incomes above \$75,000. 44% of the tax deduction benefits families with incomes above \$100,000. Direct housing subsidies for the lowest income households – those with incomes below \$18,500.” represent less than half of homeowner federal tax deductions. Federal housing subsidies represent a primary source for many families to be able to afford housing in a Massachusetts housing market that has seen home prices increase 73.5% since 1995.^{xvi}

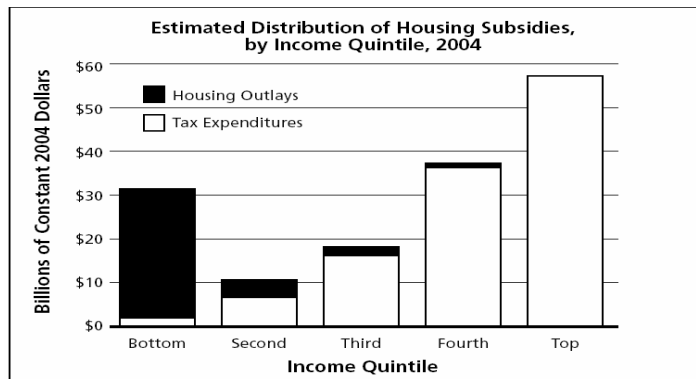


Figure 2.1. Source: Dolbeare, Basloe Saraf and Crowley. 2004. *Changing Priorities: the Federal Budget and Housing Assistance 1976-2005.* Washington, DC: National Low Income Housing Coalition

12. Concern: Social Service agencies provide services to undocumented (illegal) residents

Response:

Many human service agencies cannot, under Federal Law, consider immigration status when providing services. In other situations, agencies' missions, in keeping with respect for diversity and dignity, demand that all people who are in need be eligible for services.

References

ⁱ Advocates has 280 employees in Framingham and spends \$9 million while SMOC employs 146 Framingham residents and spends \$3,845,750 in wages and benefits. In addition, Advocates employs 800 people and is within the top 100 of 38,000 Metrowest Employers.

ⁱⁱ McLaughlin, D., "Candidates Say NonProfits Should Pay," Metrowest Daily News, March 25, 2005

ⁱⁱⁱ Spreadsheet created from pdf document prepared by Michael P. Flynn Town Assessor, 5/23/05, "Town of Framingham Tax Exempt Properties" on www.framinghamma.gov

^{iv} www.framinghamma.gov – Town of Framingham property information. Total value of Bose is \$47,218,300, Staples is \$38,380,000 and TJX is \$30 million

^v per conversation with the Office of the Superintendent, 11/8/05

^{vi} Reynolds, A.J., et.al., "Long-term Effects of Early Childhood Intervention on Education Achievement & Juvenile Arrest," The Journal of the American Medical Association, vol. 285, No.18 2001

^{vii} See George King, Town Manager's web blog of 9/21/05 <http://www.framinghamma.gov/blogs>

^{viii} www.massinc.org

^{ix} <http://factfinder.census.gov>

^x U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Table DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, DP-2 Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000, DP-3 Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000, Framingham Town, Middlesex County, Massachusetts

^{xi} Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Health and Human Services

^{xii} Additional information can be found at:

- <http://www.habitat.org/how/propertyvalues.aspx> (a Habitat for Humanity review of research on impact of affordable housing completed in 1996)
- <http://www.housingwithinreach.org/callhome.pdf> (A report, "A Place to Call Home" which addresses opposition to housing for people with disabilities in Tennessee, 2002)
- <http://www.enterpriosefoundation.org/resources/ERD/resource.asp?id=1356&c=5&a=view&f=browse> (survey of research on impact of affordable housing on property values completed in 1995)
- <http://www.nonprofithousing.org/actioncenter/toolbox/acceptance/affhousingpropvalues.pdf> (A review of 11 studies done in California from early 1980s through 1994).

^{xiii} McLaughlin, D., "Wet shelter draws from outside Framingham," Metrowest Daily News, 11/16/05

^{xiv} Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, "Substance Abuse Treatment Outcomes and System Improvements," June, 2000

^{xv} Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, "Substance Abuse Treatment Outcomes and System Improvements," June 2000

^{xvi} National Low Income Housing Coalition, "The Crisis in America's Housing: Confronting Myths and Promoting a Balanced Housing Policy"

["The Housing Bubble in New England," Dean Baker, Center for Economic and Policy Research, June 2004](#)

["Tax Benefits Still Generous for Homeowners. . .," Kenneth R. Harney, The Washington Post, February 5, 2005](#)