

Legislative Report: Dover Amendment Threat Returns

A bill that attacks the Dover Amendment rights of nonprofit schools and colleges is one of two problematic bills that have been re-introduced in the new session of the state legislature, which began in January.

Known as Senate Bill 1250 in the last session, the bill would require religious groups and nonprofit educational institutions to go through a site plan review to obtain a special permit for construction projects. The Dover Amendment currently exempts churches and schools from such requirements.

MANS&C objected to that bill—and opposes this one—in the belief that such a law would be applied differently in each municipality in the state and would result in lawsuits that would be a financial drain on schools and municipalities alike.

In addition, MANS&C's position has been that construction projects undertaken by nonprofit educational institutions are customarily privately funded, are not a drain on public funds and should not be subject to this type of review.

The bill failed to pass in the legislature last year, but was reintroduced with the same wording by its sponsor, State Sen. Marc R. Pacheco. A Democrat, Sen. Pacheco represents Bridgewater, Carver, Marion, Middleborough, Wareham, Taunton, Berkley, Dighton and Raynham.

The second bill of concern, filed by State Sen. Marian Walsh, would require religious organizations to disclose more detailed financial information than they have in the past. While not an imminent threat, the bill could be a first step toward requiring greater disclosure for all nonprofit organizations, including nonprofit schools and colleges.

Sen. Walsh is a Democrat from West Roxbury who represents Dedham, Norwood, Westwood and parts of Boston. She and other legislators filed the bill in response to con-

cerns from lay Catholics about the financial openness of the Archdiocese of Boston.

Sen. Walsh's bill was introduced in the closing days of the last session and was not acted upon at that time by the legislature.

New Bill Endangers Tax Exemption

A Worcester state representative has taken the debate over voluntary payments one step further. He introduced a bill that would strip away the long-standing tax exemption that nonprofit colleges and universities have had in Massachusetts.

Democrat Vincent Pedone's bill would allow communities statewide to levy property taxes on local colleges and universities that enroll 500 or more students.

In an article in *Worcester Magazine*, Rep. Pedone acknowledged that passage of the bill could result in a court challenge but said he wasn't concerned about it. "Our job is to do what's best for our community," he said. "I want to move forward and let the courts sort it out."

No action has been taken yet on Pedone's bill.

Payment-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOT) plans have been under discussion recently in Worcester. Last year, several groups of residents asked the city council to institute a PILOT program to provide the city with additional revenue. The city council voted down a similar proposal several years earlier.

The residents seeking a PILOT plan claimed it would help the city maintain services and other amenities.

A report recently conducted by the Worcester Regional Research Bureau, however, concluded that a PILOT program

would bring only modest funds to the city's coffers. Only about \$90,000 to \$1.2 million would be generated, it said, depending on how the program is structured.

What's worse, a PILOT program could cause colleges and universities to cut back or end their contributions to neighborhood and business development projects. It also could result in tuition and fee increases, which would adversely affect the colleges' competitiveness and undermine Worcester's ability to attract businesses.

Instead of instituting a PILOT program, the report said, the city should consider increasing its tax base by collaborating with its colleges and universities.

Nonprofit colleges and universities in Worcester are involved in a number of high-profile economic development projects.

Most recently, the Colleges of Worcester Consortium and the city formed the UniverCity Partnership to increase the impact—particularly economic—of higher education on the region. The group's board includes representatives from the colleges and local businesses and is chaired by Assistant City Manager Julie Jacobson.

In addition to direct economic development benefits, the partnership is studying a number of initiatives, including ways to enhance student involvement in community activities and K-12 partnerships between the colleges and local schools.

The consortium also recently launched a new local buying plan—an online database where area businesses can post information about their goods and services. To make local residents more aware of job openings, the consortium also created links from its Web site to the employment pages of its member colleges.

Survey Reminder

By taking just a few minutes to fill out the Economic Impact Survey, you will be providing MANS&C with crucial data on the economic importance of nonprofit schools and colleges in Massachusetts. The information will help MANS&C advance the cause of nonprofit schools and colleges in the state legislature.

It is important to note that the data will be presented only in aggregate form. The results from each individual school or college will be kept strictly confidential.

Members who have not already responded can take the survey by going to www.mansac.org and clicking on the survey link.

The survey takes less than 10 minutes to complete and asks for data that are readily at your fingertips.

Questions include:

- The name of your institution
- The number of people your institution employs
 - Full time
 - Part time (including seasonal and students)
 - W2s issued in calendar year 2003
 - FY 2004 total payroll and benefit expense
- The annual operating budget for all operations (excluding financial aid)
- The number of students enrolled in your institution
 - Total
 - Secondary school
 - Primary school
- The number of students who are Massachusetts residents
- The total annual dollar amount of financial aid awarded to Massachusetts residents
- The total dollar amount your institution spent on capital expenditures (construction projects) over the last five years

Schools that publish a list of their community contributions every year (community service, use of facilities by community members or gifts to the community) are asked to mail the list to:

Debbie Martin, MANS&C president
180 Main St., Andover MA 01810-4161

If you have questions or concerns, please call Debbie Martin at 978-749-4107.

Guidebook Offers Tips for Improving Community Relations

Amid growing public scrutiny, nonprofit schools are being urged to make school-community relations a core institutional value and a new way of life.

Most nonprofit schools believe they are already doing a good job when it comes to community relations, but there is room for improvement, according to *The Good Neighbor Guidebook*, published recently by the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington and the National Association of Independent Schools.

Although written for schools in the Washington, D.C., area, the guidebook's recommendations have relevance for nonprofit schools and colleges nationwide.

Warning that lack of communication breeds misunderstanding, the guidebook says schools need to do a better job of sharing information and building favorable perceptions in their communities.

"Good relations—and the open commu-

nication that comes with them—can keep a potentially bad situation from growing worse," it notes.

The most prevalent problems facing schools, such as zoning and compliance issues, test even the most seasoned educators and community groups. To help schools become more effective in community relations, the publication offers a detailed self-assessment tool schools can use to determine what measures have worked and what have failed in the past.

The guidebook recommends that, after the self-assessment, schools develop a practical strategy that includes:

- ◆ Regular meetings with neighbors
- ◆ Direct involvement with government officials and legislative bodies
- ◆ Personal contact with the media
- ◆ School outreach programs that benefit the community
- ◆ Active participation in citizens' groups

President's Letter



The start of a new year is always an exciting time, but this year it holds particular significance for MANS&C members. In January, a new two-year session of the state legislature opened for business. This means bills introduced for this session could have long—and possibly troubling—lives.

MANS&C's legislative counsel, John Spillane, is in the process of examining the more than 6,000 bills that have been filed so far. He already has uncovered several measures that raise red flags for nonprofit schools and colleges in Massachusetts.

Two in particular could have significant consequences. One, filed by Rep. Vincent Pedone, would strike down tax exemption for our institutions and would have major financial repercussions for MANS&C members. Another is a bill we're already familiar with. Introduced during the last session as Senate Bill 1250, it has raised its head again and continues to threaten our Dover Amendment rights. Articles about these two bills appear in this newsletter, and we will continue to provide you with additional details as they arise.

For MANS&C to be effective in stopping these and other measures, we must be armed with information that will help legislators understand the economic importance of our institutions. Our annual Economic Impact Survey provides the hard data we need to back up our argument that schools and colleges are indeed paying their fair share to their local communities.

If you have not responded to the survey yet, I urge you to log onto our Web site, www.mansac.org, and click on the survey link. The greater the response, the stronger our voice becomes.

Debbie Martin
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978-749-4107

Everyone—students, parents, staff, the head of school and trustees—should be involved in improving community relations, it continues.

In addition, schools should improve their communication techniques by developing contact lists for community leaders, neighborhood experts and other external audiences and distributing newsletters and press releases.

The guidebook emphasizes the importance of educating public officials on the benefits nonprofit schools provide to their communities. It also urges schools to become media savvy in order to "highlight the unique value and characteristics of an independent school education."

The guidebook is an outgrowth of the AISGW's Good Neighbor Initiative, launched in 2003. As part of the initiative, the association interviewed more than 50 educators, community leaders and elected officials involved in and knowledgeable about school-community relations, according to Elizabeth Downes, AISGW executive director.

Copies of the full report cost \$4 each and are available by contacting the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington at www.info@aisgw.org.

Golden Rules for Community Relations

1. Know your institution
2. Know your community
3. Begin now
4. Continue forever and signal your long-term commitment
5. Play it straight, honest and clear
6. Value community partnerships
7. Communicate wisely
8. Be a good neighbor
9. Position community relations as a core value
10. Find the common interest

Good Neighbors: MANS&C Members Meet the Challenge

The MANS&C Newsletter is starting a new feature that focuses on the far-reaching impact our member institutions have on their local communities. To include the activities of your school or college, please send them to MANS&C's communications specialist, Ann Hall, at annhall68@comcast.net.

Every year, Massachusetts nonprofit schools and colleges make significant social and economic contributions to their cities and towns. Students volunteer with community service agencies, school and city officials work together on projects and schools and colleges offer the use of their facilities to local groups.

Suffolk University benefits a broad spectrum of community life in both its Back Bay neighborhood and the Boston area. The university allows senior citizens to enroll in courses free of charge and runs a special two-month course in which grad students expand the horizons of senior citizens by teaching them about computers and the Internet.

Suffolk University Law School students volunteer as defenders and prosecutors, act as advocates and operate clinics on a number of issues. Under the New Young Americans Project, the aspiring lawyers represent young clients who speak limited English or whose parents speak no English.

Through Suffolk's Organization for Uplifting Lives through Service (SOULS), students from throughout the university tutor and serve as mentors to local youngsters, prepare and serve food to the homeless and help in a wide variety of community organizations and special projects.

The university operates a number of institutes and academic centers in everything from poetry to political research and works closely with local businesses and city government. Many of its lectures are open to the public, as are its notable art gallery and musical productions.

In addition, Suffolk actively reaches out to local schools, offering scholarships, tutoring and tours of the campus for students, as well as professional development for teachers. The



BU volunteers

university also has an Emerging Scholars Program that helps second-language high school students acquire academic English, and it runs a high school newspaper contest and high school debate tournaments.

Through Deerfield Academy's Co-Curricular Program, students may opt out of competitive sports, theatre or dance to be involved in community service. About 60 students take part each term, according to Mara Whalen, Deerfield's director of community service and multicultural programs, a fine arts teacher. The students go into schools, nursing homes, an animal shelter and a food bank and even help out at local farms.

Students also may get involved in the Big Brother/Big Sister program or choose local weekend activities with Habitat for Humanity projects or community fund-raisers. They also offer service opportunities during vacations—this year in Nicaragua, Peru and India. One program, funded by an alumnus, grants small stipends to students who want to create their own community service initiatives in their hometowns during the summer.

The Special Olympics uses Deerfield Academy facilities, the town library book group meets on campus and the school's physical plant employees occasionally pitch in to help out the town.

In addition to the significant monetary impact Boston University has on the Boston area and state, numerous community

programs and services are funded directly by the university or indirectly through research grants and support from various foundations.

BU operates neighborhood health centers, academic enrichment and remedial help programs, as well as programs for elders and people with disabilities. It operates university-owned and -supported radio stations, offers free or discounted concerts and lectures and provides its recreational facilities for high school competitions. The university also administers public schools in Chelsea through a partnership with the local school committee and offers scholarships to Boston and Brookline secondary students.

BU's Community Service Center has 10 student-run programs with more than 1,000 volunteers. Throughout the year, they tutor youngsters, help in youth recreational programs, deliver meals to homebound people with AIDS, salvage food for shelters, teach English as a Second Language classes and bring the world of music to students at a local elementary school.

BU also operates a community service program for freshmen during the week before classes begin, focusing on children, people with disabilities, elders, the environment, gender, HIV/AIDS awareness, hunger, homelessness and housing. The program enables the students to tackle problems important to the community and establish new and long-lasting friendships at the same time, according to BU officials.