

April 20, 2017

Town Meeting

Town Meeting is scheduled for May 1 and 2 at the Collins Center at Andover High School. If additional days are required to consider all the articles on the warrant, they are scheduled for May 8 and 9. The start time for each session is 7:00 pm. Free childcare will be provided on all evenings for anyone interested.

Town Meeting will consider a number of school-related articles. They include the following:

Article 4: School Department Budget. The operating budgets for each Town department, including the School Department, will be considered as separate line items under Article 4. The School Committee will propose and recommend approval of a budget of \$79,337,171, which represents an increase of \$3,237,968 or 4.25% over the FY17 school budget. This proposal has the support of the Board of Selectmen. See Appendix A for detail about the main drivers of the budget increase.

This budget proposal reflects a reduction from an earlier School Committee proposal. Notably, it transfers to the FY18 budget an expected savings of \$200,000 that will be realized in the FY17 budget. It also includes \$220,000 in solar energy credits that will reduce utility costs in FY18.

This budget is fiscally and educationally responsible, but it does not meet all School Department needs. In particular, it continues to fund the adoption of new textbooks through the Town's capital improvement budget where it must compete for resources against the maintenance of school facilities, thus compromising both curriculum and maintenance. We had hoped to move textbook adoption, along with the necessary funds, into the operating budget this year but decided to defer that action by another year in order to reach a budget agreement with the Board of Selectmen.

Finally, it must be noted that, as of this date, the budget agreement has not gained the support of the Finance Committee. Thus, it is possible that a motion may be made at Town Meeting to further reduce the school budget. The School Committee would oppose any such motion.

Article 5: Capital Projects Fund. This is the annual "pay-as-you-go" funding from FY18 tax dollars for a variety of Town and School projects. The total amount of this article is \$3,678,875 of which \$1,495,643 is intended for school capital projects including textbooks, facility maintenance and technology. The School Committee recommends approval of this article.

Article 11: Contracts in Excess of Three Years. This is a general housekeeping article which allows the Town Manager or Superintendent to enter into contracts

exceeding three years but no greater than five years. The School Committee recommends approval of this article.

Article 16: Revolving Accounts. This article authorizes a number of different revolving accounts including a School Department account for photocopy fees. The School Committee recommends approval of this article.

Article 44: Town and School Energy Initiatives. This article authorizes \$420,000 in general fund borrowing for Town and School Energy initiatives. Within the article is \$220,000 for school initiatives including continuation of a system-wide program to retrofit existing one-speed drives to variable speed drives for pumps and fans; insulation of domestic hot water pipes; purchase and installation of new condensing boilers at South School; and, separation of the main offices at Doherty and West Elementary so that they can be heated and cooled separately from the rest of the building in order to save energy. The School Committee recommends approval of this article.

Article 45: High Plain/Wood Hill Air Condition Upgrade. This article authorizes \$775,000 in general fund borrowing to install the remaining equipment, controls and wiring to allow for the entire High Plain/Wood Hill facility to be air conditioned. This will allow the district to consolidate all 504 and IEP requirements for climate control into one building. The School Committee recommends approval of this article.

Article 47: Major School Projects. This article authorizes \$770,000 in general fund borrowing for the following projects: audio enhancement systems in classrooms at High Plain and Wood Hill (\$200,000); Doherty School generator replacement (\$180,000); recoating the Wood Hill/High Plain kitchen floor (\$190,000); and, half the cost of installing a set of stairs and ADA ramp system to access the Wood Hill/High Plain playing fields (\$200,000). The School Committee recommends approval of this article.

Article 52: Selectmen and School Committee Room Upgrades. This article authorizes \$50,000 from the cable fund to upgrade the audio and video elements of the Selectmen and School Committee conference rooms to allow for enhanced presentations, improved audio, improved collaboration and full video conferencing. The School Committee recommends approval of this article.

Article 54: Wood Hill/High Plain Accessibility Project. This article authorizes \$200,000 from free cash for the other half of the cost referred to in Article 47 to install a set of stairs and ADA ramp system to access the Wood Hill/High Plain playing fields. The School Committee recommends approval of this article.

Articles 57 and 58: Dascomb Road Project. These articles create a new industrial - mixed use zoning district on Dascomb Road west of I-93. The School Committee has not taken a position on these articles, as of this date, but encourages all residents to

watch the School Committee meeting of April 13, 2017 where the potential revenue benefits of the project, as well as the potential impacts on our schools, are thoroughly discussed. (See http://www.andovertv.org/sites/default/files/videos/school_20170413.mp4 starting at minute 79)

We hope you will be able to attend and participate in this year's Annual Town Meeting.

Appendix A

School Department Budget Drivers

The budget increase in the proposed FY18 school budget is driven by the following factors:

- 1) *Contractual obligations.* Approximately \$1.5 million is needed to maintain level services in our schools, including contractual salary, step and scale increases, contracted increases in student transportation, and increased technology costs.
- 2) *Out-of-district special education costs.* The FY18 fiscal year will be the second year of a two-year spike in out-of-district (OOD) special education costs which are due to an unusually large number of very high cost students for whom we are responsible and fewer students graduating or aging out of district responsibility than in prior years. The school district has initiated major efforts to address the increase in OOD placements, particularly for students with language-based learning difficulties and with mental health and behavioral issues. In the long run, these efforts will not only serve students and families better, but will enable students to remain in their neighborhood school and reduce OOD costs. In the short run, however, we must deal with a \$1.1 million funding gap. Although the understanding coming out of last year's Town Meeting was that a large portion of this non-discretionary expense would be handled outside the school operating budget through the creation of a special education reserve fund, the other Town boards are no longer comfortable with that approach and, as a result, the full \$1.1 million must be absorbed into the operating budget.
- 3) *New High School Schedule.* \$513,000 is allocated for implementation of a new schedule at Andover High School. The schedule has been under development for several years and had to be delayed last year because sufficient funds did not exist then both to implement the new schedule and to address a serious class size problem in our elementary schools. The new high school schedule, which is similar to that used in most of the highest rated districts in the state, will replace the current two-semester block schedule with a year-long, seven credit schedule. The new schedule has numerous benefits for our students over the existing schedule, including continuity of instruction and the introduction of a personalization block which will offer students additional academic support and enrichment, time for work on group projects, and time to attend guidance, class and college preparation meetings. It also offers the possibility of taking a virtual online course for credit. The cost of the new schedule is driven largely by the need to hire seven new teachers, four for regular education and three for special education
- 4) *Other.* The proposed budget also includes approximately \$400,000 for a number of smaller needs, including: a) special education staffing; b) funds for early screening and progress monitoring assessments for students with

reading disabilities; c) additional staffing to address our rapidly expanding population of students whose first language is not English; and, d) \$100,000 to reduce the very high existing tuition for full-day kindergarten.