



## Residents asked to approve \$2.5 million override

By Stacey Hart

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Residents will be asked to approve a \$2.5 million override this spring after unanimous votes of the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen Monday night. The Proposition 2 1/2 override would provide the town and schools with a level staff budget plus some additional money, but would not get them to level services. "The town's been taking hits on the budget, a lot of it's really state aid related. We're so far behind and we're not getting additional state aid to get caught up," said Bob Jacobson, chairman of the Finance Committee.

A \$2.5 million override would create a fiscal 2008 operating budget of \$70 million, a 7.7 percent increase over the current year. Of that increase, 3 percent is due to wage and salary increases and another 2 percent is because of a rise in benefits and insurance. The remaining 2 percent is an increase in other operating expenses. A \$2.5 million override would cause taxes on the average home of \$702,800 to increase by \$402.

"I haven't heard anything that gives me an indication that there's anything frivolous in that (budget) or non-discretionary. I'm in support of it. I think we should put this forth to the voters," said Finance Committee member Debbie Zurka. This budget is the closest thing to a level service budget and it will keep Sudbury from digging a deeper hole, said Bill Kneeland, a member of the Finance Committee. "There's obviously a structural deficit. In everything presented to me I've never seen anything that seems to show that Sudbury spends in a rich way, in terms of compensation for teachers, employees," he said.

A level service budget would create an override of \$2.9 million and Jacobson said officials felt it was fiscally prudent to limit an override to \$2.5 million. "If you didn't look at the numbers, nobody wanted to go below level service," said Finance Committee member Charles Woodard. "Looking at the cost of level service, the consensus was we wouldn't be able to get there. The question was how much further beyond level staff can we reasonably go."

A level staff budget would create a \$2.1 million override.

Selectman Larry O'Brien said he was glad to see the Finance Committee was in support of a \$2.5 million override. "What this does is puts forth to the community a number we can honestly, sincerely and strongly sell and present as to why we need to pass this override," he said.

The override would allow the town and schools to do a number of things. In Sudbury Public Schools, \$50,000 would go toward paying for additional substitute teachers. Mary Will, the school's director of business and finance, said the district has a younger staff that is temporarily leaving to have children, so more substitute teachers are needed throughout the year. The K-8 district would also increase instructional supplies by \$23,500 and replace \$18,000 of grant money that is no longer available. The budget also allows for \$31,000 in transportation increases and \$125,000 for utility costs which increased because of a new contract. The largest portion of the money going to Sudbury Public Schools would fund a \$378,000 increase in special education costs. "If we only had the balanced budget, a no override...somehow the \$300,000 would have to be absorbed in the budget," said Ralph Verni, a Finance Committee member. With expenses being such a small part of the budget, Will said the cost would likely have to be absorbed by making a reduction in salaries. Two new staff members would also be added to the elementary schools, which would bring them to level service, Will said. The district would also start to upgrade some technology, she said.

At Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, \$132,000 of the budget increase will be used to replace a state grant that is no longer available. Director of Finance Judy Belliveau said the grant was used to purchase items and reduce the fiscal 2007 budget. "In FY08, in order to provide level supplies and materials, we had to reinstate that \$132,000. That created an increase right off the bat," she said. Another \$90,000 will go toward an increase in special education costs. Rising costs in transportation and utilities account for \$10,000 and \$35,000 of the increase. L-S also plans to add the equivalent of one additional staff member, but it would be split among different areas, such as teaching or counseling.

On the town side of things, the override would allow for \$48,000 to go toward vehicle maintenance and \$50,000 for roadwork. "If we had a non-override, we would have to cut out street sweeping and other roadwork to the tune of \$50,000," said Finance Director Andrea Terkelsen. The Council on Aging would use \$3,600 to restore van driver hours that had been previously cut. Utilities will see an increase of \$52,000 and gasoline accounts for a \$46,000 increase. The override would allow the town to restore some hours of the library and make slight increases to various town departments.

Jacobson said now it comes down to what the taxpayers want to do, in terms of approving the \$2.5 million override. "This isn't really a spending issue. We're not overspending unless you don't want those services," he said. In addition to seeing a \$2.5 million operating override on the election ballot and at Town Meeting, voters will be asked to approve a \$405,000 capital exclusion for a fire engine and \$8.2 million for a new police station.

The Finance Committee plans to hold a forum on the budget for residents in March.

**Note from Town staff: Forum will be on Monday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 pm at the Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School**