

Town Meeting Turns Down \$1M Bond for Road, Bridge Repair

Conveys dislike of semi-annual tax bills

By Jeremy Blackman
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Andover residents last night defeated a \$1 million bond request to repair roads and bridges, a plan selectmen insisted would save the town hundreds of thousands of dollars over the next decade.

The town voted, 96-80, to scrap the proposal. It needed a two-thirds majority to pass.

The bond would have paid for multiple projects, including road repairs, ditch and drainage work, and bridge replacements. Victoria Mishcon, chairwoman of the board of selectmen, said four bridges in town need attention. One, on Gale Road, is in such disrepair that engineers have warned it is in danger of plunging into the river, she said.

As proposed, the bond would have been paid off over seven years in annual \$158,000 installments. In a flier circulating before the meeting, the board said bundling the projects would save an estimated \$572,000 over 10 years. It would cost \$1.10 million to do the project with the bond, and \$1.67 million to do them individually in that time, they said. Selectmen said they hoped to take advantage of low interest rates and potential discounts from construction companies.

But a half-dozen residents derided the plan as slapdash and imprudent.

“The selectmen want you to spend a ton of money on engineering when you could do it a lot cheaper in-house,” said Jeffrey Miller.

Andrew Guptill, a former selectman, said he is typically an “advocate for investing in our roads,” but he’s against the proposal, because it did little to address the real deficiency – a long-term road maintenance plan.

Without that, Guptill said, they “might as well burn the money.”

Duncan Coolidge, a selectman, responded that the bonded work would offset future maintenance costs. Moreover, he said the town has a history of not following through on promised projects.

“We have a proven track record for failing on that end,” Coolidge said. “We have not spent the requisite money on bridges. We have not spent the money on roads. We have not spend the money on maintenance. This is about changing that system.”

Alex Bernhard, a resident, said he trusted the selectmen and the more than four months of research they had put into the proposal.

“I haven’t heard anybody really questioning the need for the work,” Bernhard said. “We have a need, that I think we have a consensus that it needs to be met,” he continued. “We have given to us by the people we elected a plan for meeting that need. If we walk away

from this meeting tonight not having met that need, it’s unclear when and how we address it.”

Meanwhile, residents approved a \$1.38 million town operating budget, up \$74,000 from the 2013 budget. One voter suggested eliminating a line item for uses such as transporting elderly adults, but his motion was resoundingly defeated.

“I for one hate my tax bill, but when it goes for something like that, I don’t mind paying,” Toby Locke said.

Voters also passed a \$25,000 request to purchase a new police cruiser. The town has four cruisers, but two of them are old and in need of repairs, said police Chief Glenn Laramie. Voters also backed a request to open a savings account for the eventual replacement of the Lawrence Street bridge and add \$200,000 to it this year.

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Town Meeting from page 10

Article 21 as amended failed, meaning the meeting wants the Selectmen to reconsider.

Article 22: Urging a constitutional amendment to regulate political spending. Andy Guptill moved an amendment to add “labor and trade unions” as well as corporations as not having constitutional rights.

Janet Moore: Don’t vote for the amendment; unions are not the same as

“send your money back.”

Selectman Duncan Coolidge: The property tax rate as a percent of gross income in New Hampshire is second in the nation, almost the highest. But if you look at total state taxes as a percent of gross income, we’re number 48 – almost the lowest.

Constantly trying to cut the budget is probably not the approach we need to take in Andover. We should look at how we can raise more money for the Town by trying to draw in low-impact industry to areas that are satisfactory to everyone in town. These would provide jobs and tax income. That’s a much more productive way for us to get the things our community really needs rather than constantly trying to cut the budget. The way to help people in town who are really struggling with their tax burden is to bring more business into town.

Don Kaplan: Another idea to make semi-annual tax billing more workable would be to make the June tax bill optional.

Paul Currier: The Planning Board did a survey. The majority of people would agree with Duncan about bringing low-impact businesses to appropriate areas of town. If you think bringing suitable businesses to town is a good idea, I encourage you to participate in the Planning Board process over the coming year or two of brushing up those ideas and doing some changes to our zoning that will make that happen.

A motion to adjourn was defeated.

New Hampshire Representative Mario Ratzki: March 31 is the deadline to enroll for Obamacare.

Pecco Beaufays: Mario helped someone in Andover who’d never had health insurance get it for \$40 per month, and now she’s getting the check-ups and care she needs.



Ed Becker was the lead petitioner on the warrant article to reconsider semi-annual tax billing.

corporations.

The amendment failed.

Dean Barker: Here’s why this has a lot to do with Andover. The spending for this up-coming election cycle is already four times what it was in 2012. How would we in Andover be able to defend ourselves and our local elections against these mountains of money? The Supreme Court lets corporations spend millions of dollars to affect local elections. It’s also pertinent to Andover because we’re in New Hampshire, the first primary state, so it might get the attention of people on the left and on the right who want to run for president.

Article 22 passed unanimously.

Article 23: Any other business.

Howard Wilson spoke against Obamacare and urged everyone to

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