

School Budget Strives to Balance Taxpayers' and Students' Needs

Proposed budget nets out at 3.7% increase

Dean Barker
Chair, Andover School Board

A guiding principle of the Andover School Board during budget season is to strive to strike a balance that is as respectful of property taxpayers as it can be on the one hand, and on the other serves the educational needs of the students of Andover Elementary/Middle School.

It is hard to define a starting date for this budget process, as discussions about the needs of the school and places to find efficiencies are ongoing internally at AE/MS throughout the school year and summer.

That said, the formal process for crafting a proposed budget begins in the fall with a series of budget work sessions that, like our monthly board meetings, are open to public input. Those budget work sessions took place on November 12, December 3, and December 10.

From there, the Andover School Board made an initial presentation of the proposed budget to the Budget Committee on January 14 (the original January 8 date was postponed due to snow). We then returned on January 15 to present the budget at the Budget Committee's public hearing on it, where we were grateful to receive questions

and observations from those members of the public in attendance as well as from the Budget Committee.

From there, the Budget Committee will deliberate on whether or not to recommend the budget, and an annual report will be published from AE/MS with the proposed 2020-2021 budget included in it. Finally, at the annual school meeting on Monday, March 2, the budget will be presented again and voted upon by the town.

The proposed 2020 budget contains several areas of net increase and decrease in its function totals. To accommodate for increased enrollment projections in grades nine through twelve, the proposed high school tuition line shows an increase of \$140,000.

Within the regular education function (1100) this increase itself is offset by a \$70,000 decrease in teacher salary due to a retirement. Overall, the 1100 function includes a proposed net increase of \$70,435. Contracted special education services we are legally obligated to provide are projected to increase by \$21,500.

An increase in operations and maintenance, due to a proposed change from a two to two-and-a-half person custodial staff, represents a \$59,528 increase. An increase of \$14,000 in grounds expenses is chiefly due to snow removal

that the Town of Andover has asked us to budget for rather than through them.

A new transportation contract results in \$7,633 of additional expenses. Previously approved, collectively bargained obligations provide an increase of \$76,263 in the 2900 function (roughly half of which is due to an increase in salary from the third year of the teacher contract, and the other half due to separation pay from three upcoming retirements). Adding up the smaller net increases to those listed above brings a total of \$259,383 in total increases throughout the proposed budget.

The major net decreases are due to retirements in special education and administration (\$28,627 and \$10,828 respectively) and a decrease in the annual bond interest from the recent facilities project (\$6,940). Adding the smaller net decreases to these brings a total net decrease of \$48,820, and thus a total net change of \$210,564.

Adding the net change to the previous year's budget of \$5,655,656 equals a proposed school budget of \$5,866,221, or a 3.72% increase over last year.

It is important to note, however, that this increase is offset by the estimated revenues for the upcoming year from state and federal funding. We estimate an increase in special education aid of \$9,601; in the adequate education grant

of \$33,279; in the statewide property tax of \$10,195; our projected fund balance to reduce taxes is estimated to increase \$122,470; and the food service fund by \$5,000. The total revenue that is estimated to be on hand to offset the \$210,564 net budget increase comes to \$180,545, drastically reducing the estimated net effect on property taxes.

Finally, there are two other warrant articles of note beyond the operating budget for consideration. The first is to see if the town will raise \$17,665 for the first year of the three-year collective bargaining agreement reached between the school board and the Andover Support Staff Association (ASSA). The second article asks the town to vote to reserve \$30,000 from our unassigned fund balance (or, if the fund balance is lacking, to raise from general taxation) for our Building and Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund. This is in order to help build up this trust fund so that when our boiler needs replacing, the total cost will not have a dramatic impact on a future school budget.

For more detail on the proposed budget and other warrant articles, please refer to both the upcoming annual report and also the video of the Budget Committee public hearing on the school budget when it becomes available at AndoverNH.gov/home/pages/videos.

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