

April 13, 2017

To the residents of the Town of Milton:

The Warrant Committee has posted its recommendations for the Annual Town Meeting convening May 1, 2017, to the Town Meeting webpage; you can find the Warrant [here](#), under Current Information. This massive document is required reading for all elected Town Meeting members, who will be receiving it in their regular mail. In my opinion (if you can't read it all) there is some information all voters in the Town should read prior to the next Town Meeting, because this year your elected officials will debate whether or not to approve a contingent (override) budget. Included below are excerpts from the Report of the Warrant Committee, which appears toward the front of the Warrant and which I encourage you to read so you are aware of the potential impacts of the non-contingent and contingent budgets recommended for FY18, starting July 1, 2017.

For FY18, the Warrant Committee recommends two budgets, a non-contingent budget that would not meet the needs of our departments nor produce the services our residents expect and deserve, but which meets our statutory obligation to recommend a budget balanced to the funding available; and a contingent budget which better meets the needs of our departments, replaces many positions which have been lost through cuts in recent years, and makes some much-needed progress in several areas. We prefer the contingent budget and the Warrant explains why. For it to become a reality, Town Meeting will have to approve both the non-contingent and contingent budgets. The Board of Selectmen would then have to call for a Town-wide referendum, which they have said they will do if Town Meeting approves the contingent budget. And finally, the voters of our Town will have to vote in the affirmative to override Proposition 2 1/2 to meet the additional funding required in the contingent budget. If any of those steps fail, the non-contingent budget will become effective on July 1, 2017 and the cuts described in the Warrant will be implemented. As described throughout the Warrant, the contingent budget does not include every request submitted to the Warrant Committee, nor does it include every request the Warrant committee deemed reasonable. The contingent budget is the product of several months of careful analysis and thoughtful negotiation to find a balance between the growing needs of our Town—resources for which have been chipped away through several years of trying to get by—and the taxpayers' assumed tolerance for a potential override of Proposition 2 1/2 to meet some of those needs.

The Warrant Committee recommends that Town Meeting approve a total budget of \$115,963,194, which will require an override of Proposition 2 1/2 of \$3,296,263. The contingent recommendation is an increase of \$5,495,969 or 7.43% above last year's tax levy. The non-contingent budget would result in an increase of \$2,199,706 or 2.98%. For the average resident, with a home currently valued at \$625,017, the contingent budget would result in an estimated annual property tax of \$9,105, reflecting a \$630 increase over this year, about \$378 more than the average homeowner would pay with the non-contingent budget. At a cost of \$378 a year (or \$31.46 a month) to the average homeowner/taxpayer, we believe the contingent budget is an excellent investment in your home and in your Town that will continue to support a dynamic and well-regarded school system, a safe and well-maintained community with desirable amenities, an

excellent bond rating, and many of the other factors that have supported Milton's steadfast and reliable return on real estate, and which have made it a great place to call home.

Appropriation comments throughout the Warrant include much more detail on the impact of the nearly \$1.5 million in cuts the Warrant Committee was required to excise from budgets. Here's a summary of the bad news if the contingent budget is not approved by Town Meeting and if an override is not approved by the voters:

- The schools will suffer significant loss of funding, talented teachers, and important programs. A total of 19.4 full time equivalent positions will be eliminated, resulting in the loss of an elementary instructional technology teacher; the elimination of elementary band, strings, and Artistic Creative Enrichment (ACE); the reduction of time for elementary art, music and gym; the loss of middle school STEM and math classes, the loss of middle school computer, music and art electives; the loss of a high school math teacher; the loss of high school social studies, technology, English and fine arts electives; a reduction in the Out of District Coordinator position; and reorganizations of administrative and technology staff. These reductions would be difficult enough to absorb if the needs and makeup of our school population stayed the same year-to-year, but they do not. These cutbacks come with ever-increasing unfunded requirements and mandates for many of our school populations, including those with individual education plans, further increasing the pressure on our School budget and our administrative team to ensure they are meeting all regulations and the needs of all our students. Total cuts to the schools: \$1,033,337.
- The Department of Public Works will receive the greatest percentage budget cut of any department, more than 3.6%. Recycling Center hours will be reduced to one day every other month, and the types of materials collected will be further limited. Trash will not be cleared from our business districts on Sundays. Damaged barrels will be eliminated, not replaced. Fewer trees will be replaced. Seasonal help will be reduced and the summer employment program will be eliminated. Saturday wages will be eliminated, which will have negative ripple effects for other departments while their fleet vehicles are off the road during working days for repair and maintenance. Total cuts to the Department of Public Works: \$141,537.
- There will be fewer police officers patrolling our streets. It is estimated that with the proposed cutbacks, there may be as few as four officers patrolling Milton 25% of the time. Milton is divided into 6 patrol districts. Not only does this mean two districts would go uncovered 25% of the time, the impact will be far greater when more than one officer/car is required to respond to an incident, leaving even more of the Town without coverage. The Warrant Committee heard a new term this year: backfill staffing wages—a different label for overtime. The new moniker is a helpful description of the nature of overtime in a department with minimum staffing requirements that is also understaffed. If someone is out sick, on vacation, injured, training or otherwise not at their post, how does that post get covered? It gets covered with backfill staffing wages, when they exist. The police department relies on this funding to provide the necessary (sometimes minimum necessary) safety force for our Town and unfortunately, we are recommending to reduce it further. Beyond patrols, other priorities, like addressing increasingly complex special populations (schools, elderly, domestic violence victims), traffic enforcement, and

substance abuse intervention will certainly be more difficult. Total cuts to the police department: \$85,000.

- The fire department also operates with minimum staffing requirements, which some consider a guideline, and relies heavily on backfill staffing wages/overtime. Whether three or two firefighters is the right number of people to staff our two smaller fire stations, the Fire Chief warned us that we are below minimum staffing requirements and cutting more than the Warrant Committee is recommending here would result in occasional station closures. We wanted to avoid cutting past that point, so we recommended cutting up to it. Total cuts to the fire department: \$57,714.
- The library will be closed on the weekends in the summer, meaning a loss of 80 operating hours annually and significantly reduced summer programming. Total cuts to the library: \$13,051.
- Additional reductions will further strain the Council on Aging, Consolidated Facilities, the Park & Recreation Department, and the IT department.

Overrides have been predicted, discussed and postponed for several years now. New growth and increased revenues have allowed us to delay the inevitable for the past few budgets, but we have stretched that good luck as far as is prudent and the results above are painful and will be discouraging to many.

Now for the good news; those cuts are avoidable, and progress is possible. More than 70% of the contingent budget we recommend funds restoration of cuts. As mentioned, the contingent budget does not include every request the Warrant Committee received, nor every request we thought was needed or appropriate. We arrived at an override recommendation after careful consultation with our department heads, elected boards and committees and of course our neighbors. The number we are recommending is \$123,925 less than the override passed by Town-wide referendum in 2009 on a budget nearly \$30,000,000 smaller than we have today. Even before considering the effect of inflation on the value of money today compared to 2009, we believe a lower override recommendation (proportionally much smaller) eight years later is a responsible and tempered recommendation. Here's a summary of what taxpayers would be paying for under the contingent scenario we recommend:

- Restoration of all the cuts listed above
- Restoration of cuts which were made in previous budgets, including two police officers, a master mechanic and administrative relief at the DPW, funding for preventative building maintenance and repairs, overtime for the fire department; and in the school department: a vice principal at the middle school, assistant principals at the elementary schools, teacher support, reduced fees for riding the bus to school and participating in sports and activities, and a part time guidance counselor.
- Much needed additions to the budget, including a code enforcement officer, a licensed craftsman for consolidated facilities, half a chief procurement officer, a reference/technology librarian, additional outreach coordinator time for the Council on Aging, a senior administrative clerk for the Town Clerk's office, an additional laborer for Parks and new funding for increased legal costs, including services related to airplane noise mitigation, and master plan implementation.

It is likely unrealistic to think that a Town like Milton can get by without occasional operational overrides. The nature and restraints of municipal finances in our Commonwealth and the composition of our tax base nearly ensure their necessity from time to time. There are limitations to growth in our Town, including the desire to maintain beautiful open spaces and the residential neighborhood feel we all enjoy. And we have reasonable expectations for our schools, library, DPW, police, fire, administrative offices and other departments. Those reasonable expectations come with reasonable cost increases each year, and those cost increases generally outpace the limited new growth we allow and the 2.5% maximum tax increase permitted. It stands to reason then: every year an override isn't passed, some capacity somewhere in our Town is lost due to the natural and expected growing demands on our resources. Little things we value, and which prospective home buyers and business owners value, are chipped away each year to allow for fair wage increases, rising costs of goods and services, growing complexities of keeping up with crime, and continuing to meet the needs of our seniors, school children and just the average library visitor. Of course, we can do more with less. We do it every year. And we will continue to seek out efficiencies with less and less resources year after year. Recent initiatives have approved new taxes to care for a fire fighter injured on duty and to meet new unfunded Federal stormwater requirements—new monies for new costs. No lost capacity has been replaced. It has been eight years since an operational override was requested of our taxpayers and the time has come. The Warrant Committee supports an operational override of \$3,296,263. The Board of Selectmen supports it. The School Committee supports it. The Library Board of Trustees supports it. The fire and police chiefs support it. Universally, every department head we questioned supports it. We hope you will support it too.

Sincerely,

LeeMichael McLean
Town Meeting Member, Precinct 10
Chair, Warrant Committee