

# **A BUMPY ROAD**

## **MANAGING YOUR BUDGET WITHOUT AN OVERRIDE**

**Presented to Mass. Municipal Association**

**May 13, 2026**

**Shaun A. Suhoski, JD**

**Athol Town Manager**

# Anytown, Massachusetts

## Typical Service and Cost Centers

Education / Schools

Police

Fire/EMS

Public Works

Social services (library; COA)

Admin and finance (town hall; backbone)

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Health and other insurances

Retirement assessments

“Kitchen Sink” omelette (OPEB, debt service, capital plan)



# Athol snapshot:

Population: **12,000** (about state median)

Full-service community; urban core / agrarian fringe

Poverty rate: **16.3%** (exceeds state and region)

Median household income: **\$69K** (lowest quartile)

Avg. SFH tax bill (fy26): **\$3,924** (lowest quartile)

FY27 prop. operating budget: **\$28.1 million** (+6.7%)

Range of FY2025 and FY2026 Average Single-Family Tax Bills (number of communities in each group)



Chart source: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/fy2026-statewide-average-single-family-tax-bill>

DEPT. of PUBLIC WORKS				
DPW Office	320,087	347,852	319,814	-0.09%
DPW Highway	1,365,257	1,466,418	1,345,148	-1.47%
DPW Cemetery and Parks	542,789	575,050	575,050	5.94%
<b>Subtotal Public Works</b>	<b>2,228,133</b>	<b>2,389,320</b>	<b>2,240,012</b>	<b>0.53%</b>
<b>Subtotal Gen'l Gov't</b>	<b>20,405,916</b>	<b>22,505,924</b>	<b>21,564,158</b>	<b>5.68%</b>
Gen'l Gov and Education net of Debt Service	24,272,938		26,198,695	7.93%
EDUCATION DIST. COSTS				
ARRSD Assessment	5,439,560	6,497,673	6,025,813	10.78%
Debt Exclusion Asmt (high school repairs)	163,970	167,695	167,695	2.27%
Monty Tech Assessment	407,149	424,565	424,565	4.28%
Tech School Tuition	0	0	0	
<b>Subtotal Education</b>	<b>6,010,679</b>	<b>7,089,933</b>	<b>6,618,073</b>	<b>10.11%</b>
<b>TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET</b>	<b>26,416,595</b>	<b>29,595,857</b>	<b>28,182,231</b>	<b>6.68%</b>

Total general gov't budget reflects inflationary pressure on supplies, payroll, insurances and retirement assessment.

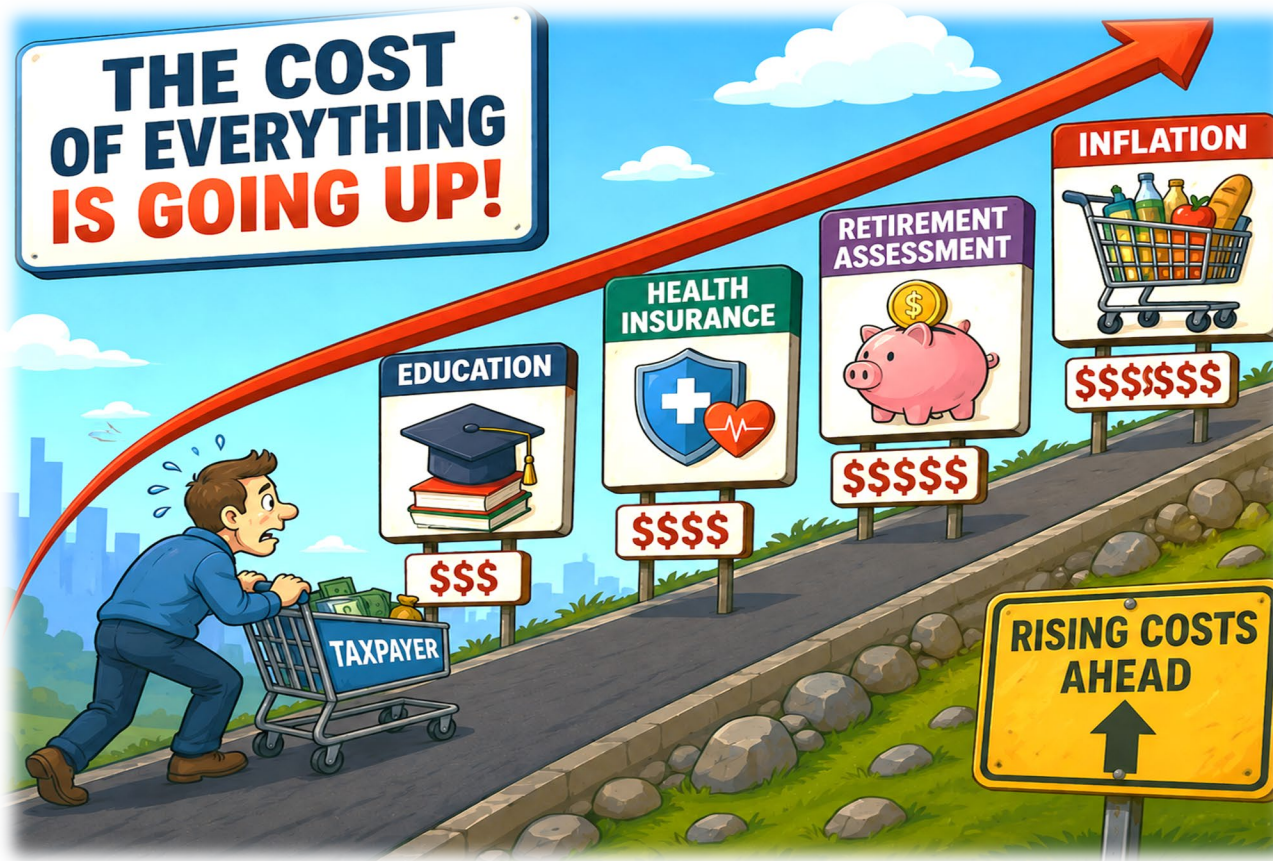
+586K total incl +268K min reqd cont & 320K assumption of regional transportation costs

FY27 headcount 106 (-3 students)

Total proposed FY27 operating budget including education assessments.

# Top Athol **expense drivers** (fy25 to fy27): **-\$2.47M**

Education: \$1.02M | Health Insurance: \$960K | Retirement: \$492K



# Top Athol **revenue drivers** (fy25 to fy27): **+\$1.85M**

Prop 2 ½: \$840K | New growth: \$412K | State aid (UGGA): \$118K | Local receipts: \$478K

# Athol FY27 Pre-override Budget Projection

## Revenue deficit of \$1.75M

Select Board votes two override options for ballot

### OVERRIDE PROCESS AND POTENTIAL QUESTIONS Athol Select Board – February 26, 2026

#### Process

- 1) Requires **MAJORITY** vote of Select Board to place question(s) on the ballot (debt exclusions require 2/3 vote). Questions must be submitted in writing to Town Clerk for placement on the ballot at least 35 days prior to election (March 2, 2026).
- 2) Requires **MAJORITY** vote at the ballot box (annual election is April 6, 2026) to pass.
- 3) Requires **MAJORITY** vote at Annual Town Meeting for appropriation of funds (June 8, 2026).

#### Form of Question (per MGL c. 59, sec. 21(C)(g))

Following is example of a "tiered" or "pyramid" override option.

Shall the town of Athol be allowed to assess an additional \$2,900,000 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding **the operating budget of the town and regional school district** for the fiscal year beginning July first 2026?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Shall the town of Athol be allowed to assess an additional \$1,800,000 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding **the operating budget of the town and regional school district assessment** for the fiscal year beginning July first 2026?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

- Source: Proposition 2½ Ballot Questions Requirements and Procedures, Division of Local Services, Mass. Department of Revenue, August 2017.

#### Annual Town Meeting

A **MAJORITY** vote at the June 8, 2026 Annual Meeting is required to appropriate the funds.

FINANCE DEPARTMENTS	FY26 App'd	FY27 Dept. Req.	FY27 Town Mgr	% chg.	Notes
Accountant	172,877	196,211	196,211	13.50%	Reserve fund boosted due to uncertainty, policy target is 122k; bal w/ school adm't
Assessor	188,028	208,257	208,257	10.76%	
FWAC	110,250	250,250	242,960	120.37%	Includes +680K increase driven by health insurance premiums (20% mid fy26, 16% projected fy27)
Capital Planning Cmte	1,350	1,350	1,350	0.00%	
Collector/Treasurer	3,083,865	3,774,598	3,764,598	22.67%	
Gen Govt Debt Service	2,143,659	1,983,538	1,983,538	-7.47%	
<b>Subtotal Finance</b>	<b>5,680,029</b>	<b>6,414,200</b>	<b>6,396,910</b>	<b>12.62%</b>	
<b>PUBLIC SAFETY DEPTS.</b>					
Dept. of Inspectional Services	283,103	315,680	312,326	10.32%	Total costs now offset by reg' ag'mnt w/ Royalston @ 22.5K
Fire Department	3,033,066	3,328,414	3,328,380	9.71%	
Board of Health	109,856	187,930	187,890	10.62%	
Police Department	2,862,570	3,097,811	3,095,156	8.50%	Offset by 71K assessments to Orange and Royalston
Regional ACO	148,220	167,301	167,301	12.87%	
<b>Subtotal Public Safety</b>	<b>6,487,415</b>	<b>7,097,136</b>	<b>7,091,056</b>	<b>9.30%</b>	
<b>PUBLIC SERVICE DEPTS.</b>					
Select Board	715,660	722,638	722,638	0.97%	Line item will increase w/ layoffs for unemployment insurance; also includes P&C and WC insurance for Town
Council on Aging	182,316	178,669	176,715	6.25%	
Conservation Commission	37,300	37,300	37,300	0.00%	
Retirement	2,679,238	2,980,454	2,958,454	10.42%	WRRS assessment incr +281K
Elections & Registration	33,219	54,919	54,919	65.32%	
Library	693,205	748,935	748,935	8.04%	
Parking	5,985	9,125	5,125	-14.37%	
Planning and Development	212,456	230,470	229,850	8.19%	Includes legal, audit, IT svc & equip, Web site, software licenses, electricity/streetlights
Professional Services	467,370	510,905	468,805	2.46%	
Recreation	26,780	26,780	26,780	0.00%	Beach and recreation programs to be eliminated FY27
Beaches	61,350	63,150	63,150	2.62%	
Town Hall Building / Facilities	273,807	383,712	285,428	7.87%	
Town Clerk	204,244	223,681	223,731	9.49%	
Town Manager	197,898	216,883	213,323	7.80%	
Veterans Services District	245,775	233,357	233,357	-5.05%	
Zoning Board of Appeals	3,810	3,810	3,810	0.00%	+300K for WRRS, extra election; otherwise 2.5 percent increase
<b>Subtotal Public Services</b>	<b>6,010,339</b>	<b>6,604,768</b>	<b>6,460,941</b>	<b>7.50%</b>	
<b>DEPT. of PUBLIC WORKS</b>					
DPW Office	320,087	347,852	319,814	-0.09%	
DPW Highway	1,385,257	1,498,418	1,498,418	7.41%	
DPW Cemetery and Parks	542,789	575,050	575,050	5.94%	Total general gov't budget reflects inflationary pressure on supplies, payroll, insurances and retirement assessment.
<b>Subtotal Public Works</b>	<b>2,228,133</b>	<b>2,389,320</b>	<b>2,361,282</b>	<b>5.98%</b>	
<b>Subtotal Gen'l Gov't</b>	<b>20,405,916</b>	<b>22,505,424</b>	<b>22,310,089</b>	<b>9.33%</b>	
Gen'l Gov and Education net of Debt Service	24,272,938		27,115,065	11.71%	
<b>EDUCATION DIST. COSTS</b>					
ARRSD Assessment	5,439,560	6,497,673	6,198,252	13.91%	+757K total incl +268K min req'd cost & assumption of regional transportation costs
Debt Exclusion Asmt (high school repairs)	163,970	167,695	167,695	2.27%	
Monty Tech Assessment	407,149	424,565	424,565	4.28%	FY27 headcount 106 (-3 students)
Tech School Tuition	0	0	0		
<b>Subtotal Education</b>	<b>6,010,679</b>	<b>7,089,933</b>	<b>6,788,512</b>	<b>12.94%</b>	Total proposed FY27 operating budget including education assessments.
<b>TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET</b>	<b>26,416,595</b>	<b>29,595,357</b>	<b>29,098,601</b>	<b>10.15%</b>	
<b>ENTERPRISE FUNDS: Water, wastewater and transfer station funded by ratepayers/ consumers of services.</b>					
Sewer Enterprise	1,342,069	1,345,115	1,392,242	3.74%	
Sewer Debt	322,819	322,939	322,939	0.04%	
Water Enterprise	1,295,184	1,349,841	1,364,702	6.91%	
Water Debt	59,200	52,000	52,000	-12.16%	
Transfer Station	871,375	920,117	919,116	5.48%	
Transfer Sta Debt	37,168	38,313	38,313	-2.35%	
<b>Subtotal Enterprise Funds</b>	<b>3,927,835</b>	<b>4,025,325</b>	<b>4,107,313</b>	<b>4.57%</b>	
<b>TOTAL G/F AND ENTERPRISE</b>	<b>30,344,430</b>	<b>33,620,682</b>	<b>33,205,914</b>	<b>9.43%</b>	
<b>FY27 REVENUE AND EXPENSE TIE-IN</b>					
PRELIM REV PROJECTION 2-10-2026		Estimated Revenue	Estimated Expense	Surplus / (Deficit)	
		27,349,468	(29,098,601)	(1,749,133)	FY27 - SHORTFALL @ \$1.75M - SEE TWO-PHASE PLAN TO RESOLVE
					FY26 - BALANCED
					- Employee steps eliminated for FY26
					- Universal one percent (1%) COLA for staff
					- Utilized roughly \$315,000 in 1X subsidies

# Athol Override Options

- \$1.8M essential services
- \$2.9M future growth



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – ATHOL FY27 OVERRIDE REQUEST**  
 Click [HERE](#) for full FAQ document

**Background**

Athol faces a significant FY27 budget deficit due to rising fixed costs that have far outpaced allowable revenue growth under Proposition 2 ½. From FY26 and including FY27 projections, increases in major cost centers have increased approximately \$2.47 million including:

- Education assessments + \$1.02M
- Health insurance + \$960K
- Retirement assessment + \$492K

During the same period, Prop 2 ½ levy growth, state aid, and new growth together provided less than half of the revenue needed to match these increases. Last year the Town avoided an override by using one-time revenues and limiting employee wage growth—an approach that is no longer sustainable.

To address the structural deficit, the Select Board advanced two general override ballot questions to the April 6, 2026 Annual Town Election:

- \$1.8 million to maintain current services, and
- \$2.9 million to maintain current services and to fully fund education assessments, and add staff in facilities management, information tech, human resources and public safety

The higher amount – but not combined – of the overrides would become part of the permanent tax levy and would take effect for FY27, with tax bill impacts felt in early 2027.

**Impact without override**

Without an override, Athol would need to reduce approximately \$1.8 million from the FY27 operating budget. **Significant staffing and service cuts across police, fire, public works, library, Council on Aging, town hall, recreation and beach safety programs will be implemented.** Education assessments could face potential shortfalls as well.

**Tax impact with override**

The average single-family home in Athol is valued at \$309,717 with a current tax bill of \$3,924.

A \$1.8 million override would increase the average tax bill by about \$377 annually; a \$2.9 million override would increase it by about \$610.

The chart to the right illustrates the tax bill impact across a range of valuations (source: Athol Assessor).

1,800,000 OVERRIDE ONLY				
FY 2026				
VALUATION	RATE	ADDED TAX YEAR 1	MONTHLY YEAR 1	
100,000	1.22	122.00	10.17	
150,000	1.22	183.00	15.25	
200,000	1.22	244.00	20.33	
250,000	1.22	305.00	25.42	
309,700	1.22	377.83	31.49	AVG SF VALUE
350,000	1.22	427.00	35.58	
400,000	1.22	488.00	40.67	
450,000	1.22	549.00	45.75	
500,000	1.22	610.00	50.83	
550,000	1.22	671.00	55.92	
600,000	1.22	732.00	61.00	

2,900,000 OVERRIDE ONLY				
FY 2026				
VALUATION	RATE	ADDED TAX YEAR 1	MONTHLY YEAR 1	
100,000	1.97	197.00	16.42	
150,000	1.97	295.50	24.63	
200,000	1.97	394.00	32.83	
250,000	1.97	492.50	41.04	
309,700	1.97	610.11	50.84	AVG SF VALUE
350,000	1.97	689.50	57.46	
400,000	1.97	788.00	65.67	
450,000	1.97	886.50	73.88	
500,000	1.97	985.00	82.08	
550,000	1.97	1,083.50	90.29	
600,000	1.97	1,182.00	98.50	

NO OVERRIDE				
FY 2026				
VALUATION	RATE	ADDED TAX YEAR 1	MONTHLY YEAR 1	
100,000	0.43	43.00	3.58	
150,000	0.43	64.50	5.38	
200,000	0.43	86.00	7.17	
250,000	0.43	107.50	8.96	
309,700	0.43	133.17	11.10	AVG SF VALUE
350,000	0.43	150.50	12.54	
400,000	0.43	172.00	14.33	
450,000	0.43	193.50	16.13	
500,000	0.43	215.00	17.92	
550,000	0.43	236.50	19.71	
600,000	0.43	258.00	21.50	

# Athol says... **NOPE**

YES \$14.8m

Municipality	Win / Loss	Yes Votes	No Votes	Vote Type	Department	Description	Amount
Arlington	WIN	9,829	3,855	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	Fund Town And School Operations	14,800,000
Athol	LOSS	429	1,441	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	Operating Budget And Regional Scho	1,800,000
Athol	LOSS	224	1,629	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	Operating Budget And Regional Scho	2,900,000
Chilmark	WIN	494	90	Override	SCHOOL	Operating The Uirsd	252,210
Chilmark	WIN	497	86	Override	SCHOOL	Operating The Mvrhs	48,283
Chilmark	WIN	507	72	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Funding Additional Fulltime Emt	43,427
Chilmark	WIN	468	123	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Operating The Chilmark Library Addi	24,044
Duxbury	WIN	2,189	1,936	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Levy Limit Override To Fund Operati	1,891,916
Easton	LOSS	1,021	2,805	Override	PUBLIC WORKS & FACILITIES	Dpw Personnel & Sidewalk Improven	700,000
Easton	LOSS	1,161	2,672	Override	PUBLIC SAFETY	Police & Fire Personnel	1,415,000
Edgartown	WIN	370	79	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	Education Costs, External Assessme	900,090
Essex	WIN	438	302	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	268,722 Supplement Essex Operatin	268,722
Essex	WIN	460	288	Override	SCHOOL	185,727 Supplement Mersd Assessn	185,727
Hamilton	WIN	854	368	Override	SCHOOL	Hw Regional School District Override	1,079,524
Hamilton	WIN	854	368	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	Town Operating Override	260,981
Harvard	WIN	322	239	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	General Operating Override	135,370
Holden	WIN	1,839	1,503	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	Local And School Operating Budget	5,500,000
Malden	LOSS	2,528	3,236	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Question 1b Prop 2 1/2 Override \$8.2	8,200,000
Malden	LOSS	2,819	2,946	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Question 1a Prop 2 1/2 Override \$5.4	5,400,000
Oak Bluffs	WIN	457	166	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Funding Increases In Education, Hea	1,900,000
Provincetown	LOSS	152	190	Override	PRE-PROPOSITION 2 1/2 DEB	Minimum Revenue Guarantee To Pro	332,000
South Hadley	LOSS	2,150	4,110	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	Operating The Municipal Governmen	11,000,000
South Hadley	LOSS	2,593	3,680	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	Operating The Municipal Governmen	9,000,000
Stoneham	WIN	4,001	3,274	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Funding School And Town Expenses	9,300,000
Stoneham	LOSS	3,600	3,643	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Funding School And Town Expenses	12,500,000
Sunderland	WIN	430	188	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Increase Town And Public School Bu	800,000
Wenham	WIN	393	143	Override	SCHOOL	School Operating Budget	438,589
West Tisbury	WIN	436	241	Override	GENERAL GOVERNMENT	Operational Purposes	3,491,090
Westhampton	LOSS	314	373	Override	GENERAL OPERATING	Assess \$500,000 Additional Taxes F	500,000

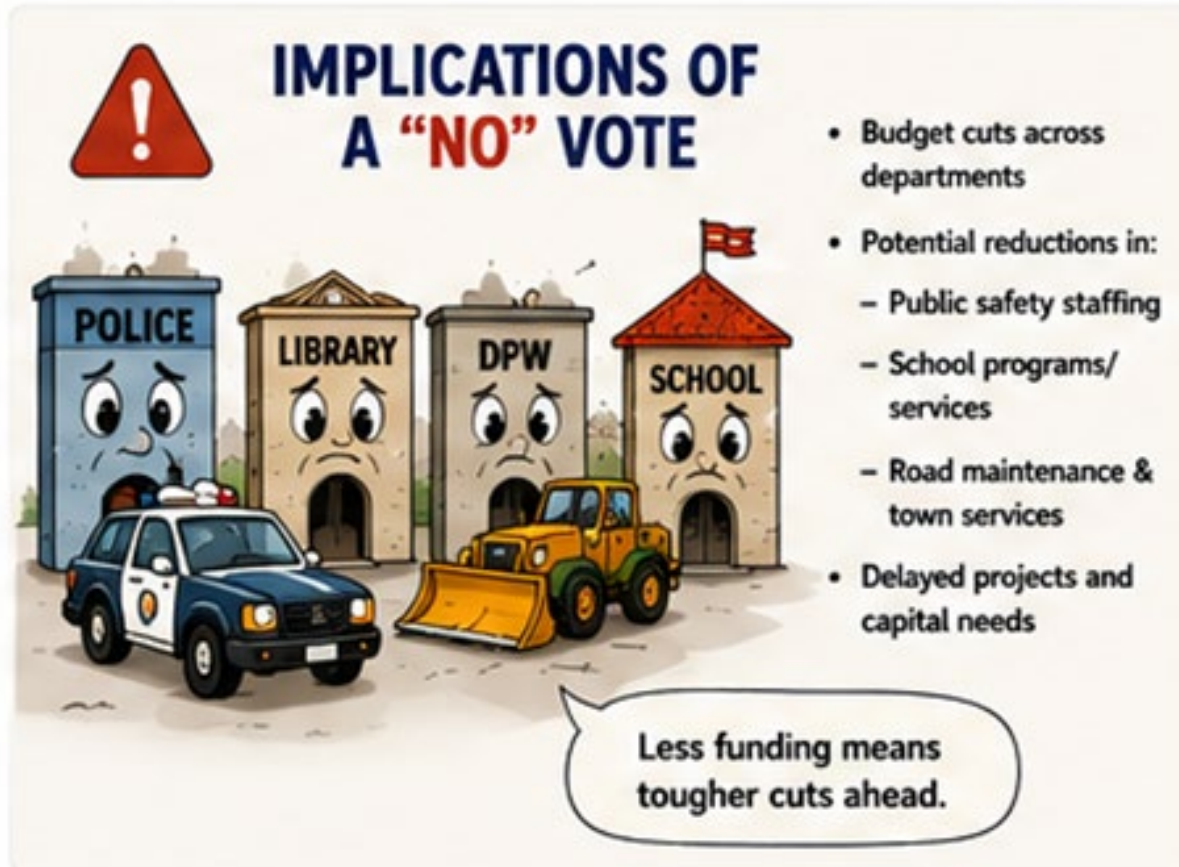
Statewide  
results as of  
May 13 per  
**MassDOR**

NO \$12.5m  
YES \$9.3m

# Athol says... **NOPE**

## Town Manager's Multi-year Plan

***“Do the least harm”***



**IMPLICATIONS OF A “NO” VOTE**

- Budget cuts across departments
- Potential reductions in:
  - Public safety staffing
  - School programs/ services
  - Road maintenance & town services
- Delayed projects and capital needs

Less funding means tougher cuts ahead.

- Force reduction of 8.5 FTEs (about 8% of workforce)
- Eliminates of summer recreation program
- Eliminates town beach lifeguards and water testing
- Cuts all Saturday hours at library
- Layoffs and positions cut in fire, police, DPW, health, library and town hall admin offices
- Requires \$1.15M free cash subsidy to bridge reduction plan into FY28
- Allows bandwidth for additional attrition, savings, efficiencies and regionalization options into FY28

**Engage whole-of-government discussion for best outcome following “NO” vote on override**



- Follow pre-override statements and implications of outcome (NO SURPRISES)
- Remember the budget reflects the priorities of the community – not the town manager or finance staff
- In-person meetings around table with joint committees (neighbors discussing with neighbors)
- Engage both off-record and on-record with all collective bargaining units
- Keep department managers fully informed
- Promote full sharing of information in convened meetings to avoid “one off” suggestions or curve-balls
- Stay calm; be professional; you are the appointed and elected leaders of the community for a reason