

TOWN OF DUDLEY
MASSACHUSETTS
Public Information Office



Debbie LaPlaca
Public Information

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For Immediate Release

March 2, 2023

Dudley selectmen to vote on proposed Proposition 2 ½ Override to go before voters on April 25

Town Administrator Jonathan Ruda reported to selectmen on Feb. 27 the forecasted revenue for the fiscal year starting July 1 will not support a level funded municipal budget nor a large increase in the Dudley-Charlton Regional School District assessment.

“An override vote passed in 2018 provided the town with the additional revenue to meet the Dudley-Charlton Regional School District’s needs for three years,” Ruda said. “The 2018 override amount was exhausted in three years, unfortunately running out in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, federal money received to cover pandemic expenses will be exhausted at the end of this fiscal year.”

“The 2018 override did not address, nor did it anticipate, the needs of the municipal side of government, specifically, our many regulatory and compliance mandates that had been largely underfunded, our increased costs due to inflation, our long-term liabilities, our staffing needs, our increased voting and election expenses, our ongoing grant and project design eligibility costs and the town’s contractual obligations,” Ruda said.

Ruda reported town expenses have ramped up since 2020 when “a hornet’s nest of regulatory and compliance issues” was uncovered. Yet, efforts continued during this time to cut expenses by reducing department budgets, combining jobs and attrition.

The numerous improvements made during this period, he said, were made possible by town employee’s commitment to successfully chasing down grant funding.

Early FY24 numbers presented Feb. 27 indicate the Dudley-Charlton Regional School District will seek an assessment increase of about \$1.25 million, roughly \$460,000 for a feasibility study to renovate Shepherd Hill Regional High School, and the \$2.5 million for a new roof on Dudley Middle School as approved by Dudley voters in September 2022.

The Board of Selectmen is expected to decide at a special meeting on March 9 whether a Proposition 2 ½ override to address both the school district and municipal needs will go before voters on April 25.

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To prepare for budget cuts, Ruda asked each department to present a FY24 operating budget with a 10% percent reduction from this present year.

“With the sobering reality of inflation and other cost increases, most of which are mandated, we are faced with a staggering number that requires us, in the absence of a successful override initiative, to make substantial cuts in FY24,” Ruda said.

At the selectmen’s Feb. 27 meeting, department heads reported the following cuts/forfeits to achieve a 10% budget reduction, the highlights are:

Police Department | Chief Marek Karłowicz

- Lay off two full-time officers
- Lay off full-time administrative assistant
- Eliminate School Resource program at Shepherd Hill
- Eliminate the police reserve program
- Eliminate police station desk coverage

Fire Department | Chief Dean C. Kochanowski

- Eliminate firefighter cancer screenings
- Reduce call firefighters
- Eliminate town beach lifeguards

Highway Department | Superintendent Jeffrey Murray

- Eliminate the foreman position
- Reduce small equipment replacement
- Reduce equipment maintenance
- Reduce asphalt and road patch materials

Veterans Services | Stephen P. Rogerson

- Reduce mandatory training, which forfeits agent certification
- Reduce Memorial Day Parade and event functions

Library | Director J. Drusilla Carter

- Reduce computer and internet services to public
- Reduce summer reading program
- Reduce adult programming

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- Reduce material purchases
- Forfeit state certification that brings grants and services

Board of Health | Chair Jennifer Cournoyer

- Eliminate health board member stipends
- Reduce Earth Day functions
- Cut health board member training
- Eliminate membership Mass. Boards of Health

Town Clerk | Lori A. Smith

- Reduce election wages by eliminating non-mandated workers
- Eliminate rings and tags mailed with dog licenses
- Eliminate by-law codification funds

Assessor | Lisa L. Berg

- Cut hours and close office to the public one day per week
- Eliminate education account, which risks forfeit of certification
- Forfeit Mass. Accredited Assessor Designation

Town Administrator | Jonathan Ruda

- Eliminate fill-in temporary labor
- Eliminate unfilled human resources position
- Eliminate archival preservation
- Reduce town report printing
- Eliminate stipends for selectmen
- Cut dam repair funding

Town Accountant | Deborah A. Thibaudeau

- Eliminate cyber security
- Reduce antivirus software, services and licensing
- Eliminate residents' online permitting

Treasurer/Collector | Richard Carmignani Jr.

- Reduce hours collector clerk
- Delay software upgrades

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Dudley-Charlton Regional School District

School officials reported that a combined total increase of \$3,665,000 is needed from Dudley and Charlton to cover contractual obligations and increased expenses. Although the school budget is not yet finalized, early numbers indicate that if Dudley is unable to raise an additional \$1.25 million toward its assessment, the district must cut \$2.7 million from its budget.

Results:

\$2.1 million reduction by laying off 31.4 full time employees across the district. This will eliminate sports and foreign language in the middle schools and elementary school library assistants. Special education staff will be reduced, and other support services will be cut.

\$580,000 in additional cuts yet to be decided but under consideration at Shepherd Hill are the elimination of activities stipends (clubs), eliminate department heads, increase class sizes, and reduce the primary music and sports offerings.

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