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Southampton OKs \$2.2M for Larrabee

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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SOUTHAMPTON - Residents applauded when the town voted yes to appropriating \$2.2 million for the renovation of the Larrabee school building Tuesday night.

The measure, which passed 105 to 16, follows a debt-exclusion override approved for the project in June. Debt service costs for the project will come from the property tax levy, with initial borrowing in March.

The town also OK'd amending an approximate \$13.1 million budget for fiscal 2009, establishing a general purpose stabilization fund with \$10,000 from free cash and transferring \$10,000 from the undesignated account of the Community Preservation fund to the Southampton Housing Authority to create a community housing plan.

Voters shot down a proposal to pay \$26,349 from the fiscal 2009 budget for unpaid bills to Ferriter & Ferriter, LLC, attorneys at law. The bills are for tax title services on Hillside Meadows and County roads, according to town officials. The article needed a nine-tenths vote to pass, and failed 85 to 13.

Barbara LaFlam, of 20 Cook Road, questioned how the expense would benefit citizens, if the work was originally put out to bid and if there is a letter of engagement between the town and the firm for the work. She also noted the town's bylaw to report legal matters at the end of each fiscal year at annual Town Meeting.

Selectman Michael Phelan said the board was first notified of the bill three months ago, which was after annual Town Meeting, and the agreement for the firm's services was made before the current selectmen were on board. Phelan said he believes there was no bid process or letter of engagement.

"The work was done, the properties have been taken, the bill is up," Phelan said.

Since the article didn't pass, the firm has the option of suing the town, creating the possibility of additional legal costs associated with the suit, Chairman Jess Dods said. He noted the board will investigate its options regarding the matter.

Meanwhile, the Larrabee building renovation project is set to take about two years, according to officials. The building, constructed as a school on College Highway in the early 1950s, will be used for town offices, community organizations and leased space for businesses.

"This is the culmination of several years of effort to maintain the character of downtown," Dods said after the meeting. "It represents very forward thinking in townspeople."

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