

Southampton TM to consider \$12 million budget

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SOUTHAMPTON - A host of financial matters will dominate the annual Town Meeting when it convenes Tuesday. Voters will be asked to approve the town's \$12.8 million operating budget for the fiscal year that begins in July, have a say on a \$158,942 capital improvement plan, and act on a request to spend \$30,000 in Community Preservation Act money on a feasibility study of a proposed greenway.

The meeting is scheduled to start at 7 p.m. at the William E. Norris School on Pomeroy Meadow Road., and if not completed in a reasonable time period prescribed by the town moderator, it will continue on successive evenings beginning at 7 p.m.

The first six of the 20 articles before Town Meeting voters involves spending community preservation funds, which are generated through a voter-approved surcharge on property taxes that communities use to support housing development, historic preservation, recreation and open space preservation.

The Friends of Southampton Greenway propose that the greenway, approximately two miles in length, follow the old railroad corridor, starting at Sheldon's Ice Cream shop on Route 10 and continuing north to Coleman Road, where it would connect to the Manhan Rail Trail in Easthampton. The study will determine the viability of the greenway.

Virginia Ahart, chairwoman of the Community Preservation Committee, wrote in a letter addressed to the Friends of the Greenway, "The committee feels that there are many questions that need to be answered prior to making a decision to continue this project. The way to find those answers is through the study and the appraisal." The committee unanimously voted to forward the feasibility study to voters.

State Sen. Michael Knapik said there is "no question" about the town receiving state funding for the proposed project during a presentation he gave earlier this month in the Edwards Public Library. "If you want to get in line we'll absolutely help you along the way," he said.

Knapik noted that there is \$800,000 pending in the state budget for the land acquisition.

"As difficult as the economic times may be we're not going to not do these," Knapik said. "The community support really has to be there if you want to do this."

Besides the greenway study, the town will act on whether or not to spend community preservation funds for historical preservation - including \$5,000 to purchase and repair veterans' grave markers; \$6,000 to preserve and copy early town records; and \$3,500 to purchase a flatbed copier and fund a technician to make copies of early town documents.

Another item on the agenda is a measure that would establish a Department of Public Works in town. Currently the Highway Department and Water Commission, both appointed by selectmen, act as separate entities. There are 10 sections under the Department of Public Works article, which calls for selectmen to appoint and fix the compensation of the department's director and employees, and the Water Commission, Park Commission and Cemetery Commission to become advisory boards to the department.