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Southampton eyes budget cuts to ease possible state aid reduction

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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SOUTHAMPTON - Town departments will have to make do with 5 percent less next year.

Selectman Chairman Jess Dods asked department heads to subtract the amount in their FY2010 budgets because the town anticipates a 20 percent reduction next year in state aid.

Town Administrator Diana Schindler said she received each department's FY2010 budget request - with the exception of Hampshire Regional High School and the William E. Norris School, both of which are a "big factor" in the town's operational budget as roughly half of the town's funds go to school budgets.

The town's current operating budget is \$13 million, with \$4.2 million in Norris and \$3.5 million in Hampshire Regional.

More than half of school funds come from Chapter 70 state aid, which in FY09 funded \$2.6 million for Norris while the town funded \$1.6 million. Gov. Deval Patrick announced Chapter 70 will not be cut next year, which stirred the Norris School Committee to ask selectmen whether its 5 percent cut is out of the \$1.6 million that comes from the town or its total budget of \$2.6 million.

"If they can manage to get funds outside the town they shouldn't be penalized," Robert Floyd, of 2 East St., said to selectmen at the board's meeting this week.

The board voted the 5 percent reduction will come from the school's total budget, including state aid.

"Every department gets something from somewhere else," Selectman Michael Phelan said. "Every budget gets cut."

Schindler said she expects school officials to attend the board's next meeting to clear any misunderstandings on Feb. 23. Meanwhile, the 5 percent reduction will be a challenge for departments, which face contractual obligations and other fixed costs.

"Even though the selectmen are looking for last year's appropriation minus the five, there are clearly lines in the budget you can't reduce," Schindler said. "It's a good starting point but a lot of things have to be jockeyed around to make it happen."

Highway Superintendent Edward Cauley said town needs for winter operations, road repairs and storm drainage pipe replacements will not be met in light of reductions. Specifically, streets including P

equot and Middle roads and Glendale Woods Drive need to be resurfaced, he added.

Departments may propose an override for additional funds, Schindler said, though "there's no appetite for that at the selectmen's table."

Annual Town Meeting voters in June will have the final say on the proposed budget. Officials are unsure when a final draft will be ready.



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"It's so speculative at this point," Schindler said.

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