

# **Southampton voters nix override: Town has to find \$92,000 for high school**

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SOUTHAMPTON - Voters rejected an override Monday to pay for the town's share of the 2007-08 Hampshire Regional High School budget by 370 votes to 300.

As a result, the additional \$91,772 called for in the override request will have to be made up from other areas within the town budget.

"It's got to come from somewhere," said Jess Dods, chairman of the Board of Selectmen. "The town can take on debt but it can't run in the red."

Southampton is obligated to pay a share proportional to the number of students who attend the Hampshire Regional High School. The exact amount was calculated after Williamsburg passed an override, Dods said.

The town had a choice of cutting money in services or expenses, more than 50 percent of which it has no control over, according to Dods. Such expenses include energy and insurance costs.

"Those are going up a lot faster than 2 1/2 percent," Dods said. "The town can't afford to provide all the services that generate the expenses."

Southampton's land has agricultural value, but as the land is developed for residential use, money is needed to provide services to the growing number of residents. The override would have increased town efficiency, according to Dods.

"There used to be more cows than people here," Dods said. "Today, farmers make more money selling land to a proprietor than selling dairy products."

The funding requested in the override, which would have added \$39.70 in taxes to an average Southampton home valued at \$265,000, seemed like a lot to some voters.

"It sounds like they're going to need that money every year for the next thousand years," one voter said. "It's like saying, 'I need a new car year after year after year - a Mercedes.'"

"I think it's a necessary evil," a proponent of the override said. "It's either spend a little bit now or spend a lot later. Unfortunately, our country spends a lot later and it costs us more in the long run."

Anne Darcy, a Southampton resident for three years, has no children but she does have an elderly mother. She said it is important for voters to look at the "big picture" when considering an override, and for departments to live within their means.

"I think an override should be a last-choice measure," Darcy said. "It is used too freely as an option. I feel bad for people who are on fixed incomes, like the elderly. They can't keep absorbing the cost increase. I'd rather see more services for seniors."

Ed Cauley, highway superintendent, said the town needs the override.

"Every little bit helps," Cauley said. "If it doesn't go through, every department gets hurt."

Fewer than 18 percent of Southampton's 3,779 registered voters came out Monday.

"Out here they don't vote," said Tania Curran, who did vote. "If they haven't voted, they shouldn't complain."