

Town of South Hadley
Questions and Answers (updated 5/9/25)
Send additional questions to Selectboard@southhadleyma.gov

MAY 14, 2025 SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

Article 2 - Specialized Education Transportation

Q: Are there third party vendors that can do this cheaper?

A: No. The town anticipates that providing this service in-house will be about \$500-600k cheaper in the first year, including benefits, if the town is able to purchase vans

Q: Where will the vans be stored?

A: The logistics are still being worked out, and there is room in the Middle School parking lot as well as the DPW yard.

Q: What is the business plan for this?

A: There is a business plan on the website in the Town Meeting section.

Q: Does the proposed funding for the purchase of School Special Education transportation include the cost of security for the new vehicles?

A: Yes. The vans have security cameras and a security system. They will be kept in areas where there will be security cameras.

Article 3 - Chromebooks

Q: How many chromebooks will this buy?

A: This will purchase 1200 chromebooks for the high school and middle school. There is a business plan on the website in the Town Meeting section.

Q: Can we teach without chromebooks?

A: It is critical that students have access to online resources, online learning, online testing and electronic communication, all of which are crucial skills for college and career preparedness.

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MAY 14, 2025 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Article 10 - Operating Budget

Q: Could opioid settlement funds be used to support counselors in the school system?

A: Unfortunately no. The Town previously explored using opioid settlement funding to support the Drug and Alcohol coalition, a program previously overseen by a school staff member that retired. The State advised the Town that these funds could not be used for that purpose and must be used specifically for initiatives directly supporting opioid prevention, treatment and recovery. While school counselors play an important role in overall student and community wellness, their services do not meet the narrow criteria required for use of Opioid settlement funding.

Q: How much grant funding is the school department receiving, and can any of it be reallocated?

A: Awards from grants are typically tied to very specific purposes and have many restrictions. Most school-related grants come from State and Federal sources and usually require hiring for specific roles and meeting deliverables. There are no current grant funds that can be used for general operations. The School Department's proposed FY26 budget includes six figures from ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding. When combined with the current year's allocation, approximately \$1 million in ARPA funds have been provided to supplement the Schools.

Q: What would the impact be of reducing or eliminating this year's OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) contribution? What would the impact be of shifting more to Free Cash?

A: Reducing the OPEB allocation from the operating budget and redirecting funds to other departments is not advisable. Additionally, this amount is typically supplemented by another \$200,000 from Free Cash and in total, still leaves a gap in what the Town should be contributing each year to reach its target. Given the current budget and projected market conditions, decisions like this should only be considered in the most severe budget situations.

Q: What would the impact be of reducing the Police budget by one FTE? Are two School Resource Officers (SRO) necessary?

A: According to a recent Staffing Study conducted, the Police Department is already understaffed by four patrol positions, based on recommended service levels for a community with our needs and population of over 18,000 residents 24/7. The SROs currently serve all 4 schools with varying needs and populations, and provide a vital resource to staff, students and families. The Town funds the SROs and building operations staff, which previously was part of the School Department budget, saving \$300,000 in personnel costs from their budget.

Q: How has staffing in the Public Health Department evolved over the past 10-15 years?

A: The Public Health Department currently has 3FTE funded in the Town budget and other positions are being funded by grants awarded to the Department for various specific programs and services. For example, the department now oversees a regional public health coalition, which brings in reimbursement funds that reduce the net cost to the Town. There has been no increase in FTE funded through the Town budget from past years, and 1 FTE (Public Health Nurse) was eliminated last fiscal year from the Town budget and animal control services may need to increase by approximately \$50,000 annually to fully meet needs. This department, like others, has absorbed reductions over past years that often is overlooked. 15 years ago the health department included plumbing inspection, which is now in Inspectional services. Excluding positions that have moved to other departments, the department had 3 FTEs, one of which was a nurse. Duties of the department have risen to include more federal and state public health mandates, emergency services and inspectional duties.

Q: Is there any early prediction about increases in medical and liability insurances for FY27 or beyond?

A: Insurance rates are often set in the beginning of the Calendar Year and are based on claims experience over the preceding 12-18 months. Employee health insurance is provided by the Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust, and general liability insurance is through the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association. Both are group insurance programs that pool resources and claims from multiple municipalities, helping to keep costs lower overall. However, in recent years, claims in both the health and liability insurance have increased significantly, and begun to outpace revenues received from premiums. This trend is expected to continue due to external market factors. While insurance groups have utilized reserves to offset costs, it's likely that we will see double digit increases again in FY27.

Q: What is a Prop 2 1/2 override, how could it happen, and what are the impacts?

A: A Prop 2 1/2 override would first require a vote by Town Meeting to approve a budget that exceeds the tax levy limit. If that vote was approved at Town Meeting, the decision to approve an override budget would then go to voters at a local election as a ballot question. The Selectboard is forming a Budget Task Force whose mission will be to evaluate the opportunities and risks and make a recommendation to consider during the development of the FY27 budget.

Q: What is the difference between the percentage increase in each department's personnel services budget and the merit increase (Wage and Classification?) proposed to \$100,000?

A: Most town departments will reflect a 2% increase, which is the sum total of the wage increases (no separate merit or cost of living increase). Changes in the DPW and Police contract that may arise from current budget negotiations are reflected in the \$100,000 line item.

Q: Given layoffs proposed, are any *new* positions being created in Town government?

A: No. Due to a reduction in workforce in the Human Services Department, there will be a transfer of duties within the department, resulting in title and job description changes.

Q: When will funding be needed for the Elementary School Building Project construction? Why aren't we allocating free cash to a stabilization fund for that project now?

A: The vote is anticipated for the Fall of 2027. Town Meeting can vote to allocate funds to the stabilization fund. The previous funds in this account have been moved to a spending account to fund the feasibility study phase, including project management, architectural design and study.

Q: Can the Senior Center Stabilization fund be used to purchase a large freezer, which may allow us to cook and prepare meals in-house at better quality?

A: Yes. The Council on Aging has discussed this. However a freezer was just donated to the Center and we will determine if that is sufficient for the time being.

Q: What is the current known amount of federal funding losses to South Hadley resulting from recent federal cuts or decisions, what is the impact and how will funding be replaced if at all?

A: This is unknown. There are over a million dollars in title grants at risk for the schools, and more than \$500k in existing funding at risk for the town. In addition, funding sources the town and schools would seek out for projects have or may be eliminated. Funding cuts are also affecting residents, including potential cuts to fuel assistance, housing, food and other social programs.

Article 20 - Citizen Petition

Q: What is the difference between the petition and the current policy?

A: The police policy section in *italics* conflicts with the **bolded** section of the petition:

Current police policy: An Immigration Detainer is an official request from Immigration and Customs Enforcement to another law enforcement agency (LEA)—that the LEA notify ICE prior to releasing an individual from local custody to allow for ICE to arrange to take over custody. When someone is in custody, and an Immigration Detainer is within the NCIC system, ICE shall be notified. However, this does not mitigate our responsibility to allow for bail, prompt presentment in court or consulate notifications as per law. Bail clerks, Clerks of Court and/or receiving agency personnel will be notified of an ICE Detainer Request

CITIZEN'S PETITION: "Civil immigration detainer request" means a non-mandatory, written or verbal, request issued by Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") or by any other federal immigration officer or agency to a local law enforcement official either (1) to maintain custody of an individual once that person is eligible for release from local custody, **or (2) to notify the requesting federal immigration office or official prior to the release of that individual.**

7. A town official shall honor judicial warrants, **but shall not respond to an ICE**

request for notification about the incarceration status or pending release of a person in custody, including a request pursuant to federal form I-247N, I-247A, or I-247X or provide ICE with information about the home address, work address, of phone number of a person in custody.

Q: What happens if the petition passes?

A: The petition as is would be treated as a bylaw and, if approved by the Attorney General's office, would supersede any existing policies.