

Letter: Ipswich override makes sense

By Todd Wilson

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Supporting the \$2.75 million override isn't about whether you have a child, grandchild, neighbor or friend currently enrolled in the Ipswich school system.

It's about the future of Ipswich: Our property values, the ability of our local businesses to attract and retain talented employees and preparing our high school graduates to be the future citizens and leaders of our community.

As a former member of the Finance Committee, I spent a good part of the last five years getting to know the people, processes and budgets, which influence our town. This perspective, combined with my own review of the proposed \$2.75 million override, leads me to two conclusions. The first is that, while there is always room for improvement and additional efficiency, our town leaders and employees run a tight ship. The second is that the \$2.75 million is a defensible, and not a lavish, request.

Before casting your vote, you should fully understand how the school committee arrived at an override request of \$2.75 million. Of the total request, \$1.3 million is needed to fund the same educational programs provided last year (level services, if you will). These services were funded in this year's budget through the use of choice and circuit breaker reserves. The School Department "spent down" these reserves with the full support of the Finance Committee and selectmen in order to avoid major cuts in teaching positions and core programs. Because these reserves are no longer available, the override is necessary to make up this year's budget shortfall. The next piece of the override, approximately \$.8 million, is to insure that there is not another override request for at least five years. With expenses rising faster than revenue (our taxes) there needs to be additional funding to cover the revenue/expense gap for the next five years. This \$.8 million will allow the schools to maintain their educational programs for the next five years without having to return to the town to request another override.

The final approximately \$.65 million of the requested override amount is for the new superintendent to implement his vision for the future of the Ipswich schools. After an exhaustive search for new school leadership, not to provide the funding to deliver the plan we asked Dr. Hart to develop just doesn't seem to make a lot of sense.

The requested override amount of \$2.75 million is a lot of money. And there are a lot of numbers being quoted as to what it means to us as individual taxpayers. Please take the time to do the math for yourself and see what it means to you and your family on an annual basis. A \$2.75 million override would add approximately \$1.15 to our tax rate. Multiply the \$1.15 by the assessed value of your home and then divide by \$1,000. Then, just for fun, divide this number by 365 to see what it will cost you on a daily basis. For many of us, this will be about the same — or less — than a cup of coffee at Cumberland Farms. Again, it's all about priorities. I think

property values, economic development and the students who will be the future citizens of our town are a compelling list of priorities.

The beauty of a Town Meeting form of government is that we get to determine our future — first on May 13 at Town Meeting, and then on May 20 at the ballot box. However you decide to vote, please take the time to understand the facts, and to arrive at your own conclusions.

Be wary of studies from impressive sounding organizations like the Cato Institute (a libertarian think tank formerly known as the Charles Koch Foundation – what do you think they'd say about paying higher taxes to support schools?).

Invest the time to understand the school and municipal budgets before casting your vote.

Understand that, while there is always room for improvement, the schools and the town are not wasting money.

Understand that strong schools are a factor, which helps the businesses in town attract and retain good people. Understand that our teachers are being paid less, on average, than their peers in neighboring towns. Understand that, while no one likes to pay more in taxes, even with a successful override, we will still have one of the lowest tax rates in our area. Look at the data, and let it guide your decision.

And, when you do, you'll understand that we need to maintain strong schools to ensure a strong future — for us all. — Todd Wilson, Pineswamp Road