

Southbridge Evening News

Support 2 1/2 override in Holland

To the editor:

The necessity of an override vote in Holland cannot be overstated.

Contrary to another viewpoint to this paper, Holland has been living within its means for the past 10 years as a result of the 1998 under ride vote for \$200,000. That vote is now worth \$250,000 in taxes that will not be assessed and collected this year. Stated another way, that's \$250,000 in spending cuts that were made before the budget was presented to the annual town meeting. Cumulatively, that amounts to \$2.4 million over the 10 years that the town did not spend.

Another widely held viewpoint is that "other towns provide garbage, sewer and water" as part of their property tax. In Sturbridge, Wales and Brimfield residents can participate in a pay-as-you-throw garbage collection or hire a contractor to pick up the trash. This is in addition to the property tax. Not very different than living in Holland. Sturbridge residents living in areas that are served by sewer and water are charged for the usage in addition to the property tax they pay. I am told sewer only is approximately \$280 per year and sewer and water is metered, and on average runs \$400 or more per year in addition to the property tax bill.

The override questions seek levy capacity that will serve the town over the next three-seven years. It is not intended to raise the entire amount in the first year but to spread out the increases over several years. Unfortunately, the town is dependent on state aid which in the current year accounts for 20 percent of the funding for the current budget. That aid is dependent upon the financial health of the state and can vary widely from year to year. In down years, such as we seem to be entering, there can be reductions in state aid as happened in 2003. It has taken six years for state aid to recover back to the level of 2002.

The alternative to passing an override will be to reduce town and school services by an amount currently projected to be \$250,000. Perhaps we should consider whether this is cost cutting or a lifestyle change for our town. Should we combine two grades at the elementary school? Should we stop maintaining private roads? Should we go back to a one man police department?

Please support the over ride question whether it be \$475,000 or \$565,000, the difference is the future of your town.

Jim Wettlaufer
Holland
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