
Special election questions pass with ease

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Wellesley -

Although turnout was relatively low, Wellesley voters easily passed both of the debt-exclusion overrides on this year's special election ballot.

The first question, which sought voter approval for \$18 million over 10 years to fund other post-employment benefits (OPEB) for retired town employees, passed by about 68 percent. The second question was a debt-exclusion bundle that approved monies for dredging Morse's Pond, storm drainage improvements, and repairs to school buildings. That passed by nearly 70 percent of the vote.

Town Meeting approved sending the debt-exclusion questions to voters more than a month ago. The OPEB exclusion was proposed by the selectmen as part of a pre-funding scheme that would save the town money over the life of the OPEB program. Wellesley Executive Director Hans Larsen explained during Town Meeting that the program needed an additional \$3 million per year over the next thirty years in order to be fully funded by 2037. Because the town can appropriate an extra \$1.2 within the levy limit to fund OPEB, Larsen said, it needed an extra \$1.8 million per year approved through a ten-year debt exclusion to meet its pre-funding goal. Larsen said the tax impact would be roughly \$165 for the median \$824,000 assessed home in Wellesley.

The other debt exclusions passed by voters will go toward capital projects such as the Morses Field Management Plan, which will try to prevent plant overgrowth in Morses Pond through dredging the pond's northern basin, adding buffered aluminum compounds to the water to prevent over-fertilization, and harvesting plants.

Debt-exclusions are ways for towns to fund large-scale projects without permanently raising taxes on their citizens. Unlike override measures, which permanently increase the overall tax levy, a debt-exclusion is an agreement by taxpayers to raise their taxes for a defined period of time to fund specific projects. When those projects are completed, the taxes attached to them disappear. Additionally, boards and committees that enter into debt-exclusion plans agree not to request anymore town funds for their capital projects for the duration of the agreement.