

March 4, 2024

Statement by Belmont Select Board Regarding Override

The Select Board affirms its support for the override on the April 2 ballot. The override is necessary to preserve what makes Belmont a uniquely desirable place to live. We all recognize the critical importance of our schools, our public safety and public works departments, our library, our senior services, and the contributions of our dedicated town employees. Without the override, these services and people will suffer irreparable harm. Our property values, the most valuable asset for most of us, also depend on good stewardship. We need to ask what decisions are in our own best interest.

The Select Board is committed to slowing the rate of growth of expenses. There are plans for strategic investments to reduce out of district special education costs and further restructure town and school departments. We have strategies for better control of multi-million dollar expenses such as health insurance and amortization of pension liabilities. Union contract negotiations are also part of the answer, because salary expense is the biggest single budget item by far.

We are also reviewing our options for increasing revenue. Zoning changes can help new construction and create new businesses. There is potential for PILOT payments and eliminating unnecessary tax breaks.

We are making progress in all these areas. It reflects a constant effort by the Select Board, our Town Administrator and new School Superintendent, the School Committee, and many other boards and committees in town.

The override will not only preserve existing services, it is the beginning of an investment in programming and staff that will help make it possible to bend the expense curve even more.

We don't engage in scare tactics. We do have a responsibility to explain the decisions made by the Select Board. In our budget summits we explained that without an override services and staff will have to be cut starting next year. The cuts would be much deeper the year after that. That is financial reality. There is no bailout this time like the ARPA money we received at the last minute three years ago that saved the day.

No opponent of the override has told you how we could preserve the same services if they cost more than our operating revenue. The opponents have not found a solution for that. If they are choosing instead to cut, I wish they would tell you that is their future for Belmont.

The Select Board urges you to get all the facts and vote Yes on Question 1 on April 2.