

Narratives on Petition Warrant Articles Generated Through HCTA Efforts

SB2 or Ballot Voting

"Shall we adopt the provisions of RSA 40:13 (known as SB 2) to allow official ballot voting on all issues before the Hopkinton School District on the second Tuesday of March?"

and

"Shall we adopt the provisions of RSA 40:13 (known as SB 2) to allow official ballot voting on all issues before the Town of Hopkinton on the second Tuesday of March?"

Many taxpayers have expressed their inability to participate in annual town and school district meetings because of the confines of the meeting date and time. Some voters have to be out of town, some travel south for the winter, and some simply have to be at their jobs. Many taxpayers have also expressed that the emotional aspect of the discussions at the annual meetings, coupled with sometimes multiple changes to warrant articles on that day, leaves them feeling unprepared to vote responsibly when the questions are finally brought forward.

Adopting SB2 changes the way the traditional town and/or school district meetings are held. Under SB2, warrant articles are placed on a ballot for all-day voting, in the privacy of the voting booth, on the second Tuesday in March, or by absentee ballot.

The town and school district still hold public meetings called deliberative sessions to discuss and amend budgets and warrant articles. Voting takes place approximately 30 days after the deliberative sessions, allowing voters time to consider and learn more about the issues prior to making decisions.

Within the process of bringing this warrant article to a vote, the Town and the School District each must hold public hearings at least 15, but not more than 30 days prior to voting. No date has been set that we are aware of yet. This article will appear on the official ballot on voting day, Tuesday, March 13, 2007 and must pass by a 3/5 majority vote. If you think we are ready to try a new method of voting in Hopkinton, vote Yes on the town and/or the school district RSA 40:13 questions

Rescind Conservation Land Purchase Bond

To see if the Town will vote to rescind the remaining debt authorization of three million seventy-three thousand two hundred fifty dollars, \$3,073,250, on the conservation bonds that was voted at Town Meeting in 2003?

Voters in 2003, by a vote of 390 to 93, caused the town to enter into an agreement to bond up to 5 million dollars for the purchase of conservation land. In light of the rapid increase in spending in town since 2003, and the subsequent tax increases, voters should be allowed to reconsider this decision.

By rescinding the remaining value on the bond, the town is still able to purchase conservation land, but only at a town meeting with a 2/3 vote. The law provides an option to petition for a special town meeting if the option to purchase will only be available between town meetings.

For the remaining balance of this bond, only a simple majority vote at a special town meeting is required. Obtaining information prior to a vote, and being given the time to consider all the information, has been a concern of many taxpayers recently. Reverting back to approving bonds individually will allow taxpayers the additional time, afforded by one public hearing, to ask for and

understand the financial impact of their decision at least seven days before having to vote on the issue. If you would like to continue with the status quo, to allow conservation land purchases to be brought forward by the selectmen, and approved by a simple majority, vote “No” on this article. If you would like to have more time, and potentially more information before considering another conservation land purchase, vote “Yes” on this article.

New Positions in Town

To see if the Town will vote to approve to limit the number of all Town employee positions, both full-time and part-time, at the number of such positions in effect as of January 1, 2007, and to direct the Selectmen not to create any new positions of whatever type, whether full or part-time, except for contracted employees who are paid under Form 1099, and, further, should the Town budget be reduced at Town meeting below the budget requested or presented by the Selectmen at the 2007 Town Meeting and positions are eliminated or reduced as a consequence of such action, such positions shall not be re-instated, with all of the foregoing being in effect for and throughout the 2007 fiscal year.

In order to help control the budget and therefore the tax rate increase, all expenditures need to be viewed carefully by voters. One area is the number of employees. Without establishing the maximum number of people that the Town may hire, the Town is free to create however many new positions it wants. Any such new positions could well then become permanent, thereby increasing, permanently, employee costs. It is therefore in the interests of the taxpayers to establish reasonable regulation on the number of positions created by the Town and consequently the number of people employed by the Town. This petition is intended to do this by capping the number of Town employees at the level (number) in existence as of January, 2007.

New Positions in the Schools

That the School District vote to hold the number of all District employee positions, both full-time and part-time, and of whatever type, including, but not limited to, educational (teacher), administrative, clerical, support, etc., at the number of positions in effect on January 1, 2007, and that the School Board and School Administration not create any new positions, (of whatever type,) whether full or part-time, except for positions that are or may be required by Federal and State laws or regulations, and further, should the District’s budget be reduced at the 2007 District meeting below the budget requested or presented by the District and that positions are eliminated or reduced as a consequence of such action, such positions will not be re-instated, with all of the foregoing being in effect for and throughout the 2007-08 fiscal year.

Far and away, the greatest cost in the operation of our schools lies in employee compensation – i.e., salary/wages and benefits. For the most part, these items are set through collective bargaining contracts. However, there is nothing within the contracts or in any School District policy or regulation that controls or limits the number of positions that the District may establish and consequently, the number of employees that the District may add. Thus, placing a reasonable cap on the number of people employed or to be employed is in the interest of taxpayers so that taxpayers can better understand and be able to control compensation cost. This petition is intended to do that for the 2007-08 fiscal year by capping the number of employees at the number in existence as of January, 2007.

Audio Recording of Town and School Public Meetings

Shall we authorize the raising and appropriation of \$400 for the purchase of audio recording equipment and materials, and require that the Town audio record all public meetings of the Board of Selectmen and the Budget Committee in a standard audio file format, and make all

recordings available to the public via the Town website no later than 144 hours after each public meeting, and to remain available on the website for a period of six months, and thereafter make files available to the public in a standard audio file format?

and

Shall we authorize the raising and appropriation of \$400 for the purchase of audio recording equipment and materials, and require that the School District audio record all public meetings of the School Board and District in a standard audio file format, and make all recordings available to the public via the School District website, no later than 144 hours after each public meeting, and to have these files remain available on the website for a period of six months, and thereafter make files available to the public in a standard audio file format?

These warrant articles, one for the town and one for the school district, are being brought forward as a fiscally conservative method of allowing taxpayers in town to actually hear the proceedings at all public town and school meetings. This article requires that the town boards/committees, and the school board, audio record all public meetings and provide access to these recordings on their respective websites. In today's busy world many interested voters/taxpayers in the town are unable to attend most meetings. This would provide a means for voters to stay informed on a regular basis, and to remain active in town and school affairs.

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The articles listed below are considered “advisory only” articles. This means that they are not binding. They reflect the wishes of the voters and, if passed, are sometimes honored by elected officials, and sometimes they are not. These articles challenge the way our elected officials are currently carrying out their duties. While these articles can not compel change, they can provide the elected officials valuable information about how the voters feel about their decisions. These articles also provide the voters the information they need regarding elected officials abiding to the wishes of the voters.

Close Columbia Hall

“To see if the Town will vote to close and sell Columbia Hall within 6 months from the date of this Town Meeting.” *Submitted by Petition*

Discussions surrounding the use of the new Slusser Senior Center led many taxpayers to believe that activities provided by the recreation department would be allowed in the new Senior Center, allowing the town to sell Columbia Hall. The recent evacuation by past users of the facility, due to safety concerns, dissatisfaction expressed by voters for the annual \$15,000 tax dollars spent on maintenance of the building, and the ongoing problem of inadequate parking, have convinced many that keeping this building is not in the best interest of the town. During the last year, at several public meetings on the Slusser Center, the selectmen have stated that the offices of the recreation department, social services, the food pantry and other programs in operation at Columbia Hall would be moved to the Slusser Center upon its opening, negating the ongoing need for Columbia Hall. The fact that the selectmen have moved the Recreation Director's office into Columbia Hall, and have exerted much effort and taxpayers' dollars to spruce up the interior and repair the roof, entered into agreements to rent space to businesses collectively leads many taxpayers to question why we were not asked if this is a building we want to invest in. The programs being created by the recreation department are serving some residents of the town, many taxpayers believe that the concept of refurbishing this facility and expanding programs should have been brought forward as a plan and voted on before proceeding. To continue expending taxpayer dollars on Columbia Hall, the following should be developed: a mission statement, a list of activities which would fulfill that mission and a breakdown

of how this mission will be funded. Without this, some taxpayers feel that the selectmen, while perhaps operating within the law, are not operating with the consent of the people. This warrant article will promote discussion and an opportunity for taxpayers to provide definitive direction. If you want the recreation department and the board of selectmen to continue as they have, vote “No” on this article. If you would like this activity to stop, and Columbia Hall to be sold, vote “Yes.”

Annual Surplus

Going henceforth, shall we request of the Board of Selectmen to retain five percent (5%) of regular general operating expenditures from the annual surplus(fund balance) with the excess to be returned to the taxpayers by using said funds to offset each current year’s tax rate?

Each year the Selectmen, at their discretion, direct the surplus or general fund balance. The Department of Revenue Administration (DRA) recommend towns to retain a minimum of 5% in case of an emergency, and is equal to about \$1,000,000 for the town of Hopkinton.

The selectmen have recently adopted a fiscal policy where any surplus, over the recommended 5% in reserve, be used to pay off long term debt.

Taxpayers enter into long term debt in order to afford large ticket items on a yearly basis, as well as to spread out the expense over many years so that all those who will benefit will share in the cost.

Agreeing to allow the selectmen to use their discretion to pay off long term debt is essentially agreeing to reverse the decision of the voters.

Selectmen are currently planning on only returning \$200,000 per year from the surplus(or unexpended reserve) rather than return all back to the taxpayer to cut the tax rate.

If you want the selectmen to use their discretion to use surplus to pay off long term debt, vote “No” on this article. If you want the Selectmen to reserve 5% of the surplus, as recommended by the DRA, and to return all remaining funds to the taxpayers by reducing the tax rate, vote “Yes” on this warrant article.

Tax Impact Statement on School and Town Warrants

Shall we require the Hopkinton Budget Committee to provide a tax impact statement and budget committee vote tally on each town and school district warrant article they recommend, or do not recommend?

This advises the Budget Committee to include tax impact statements and budget committee vote tallies on all town and school warrant articles. The idea is that voters/taxpayers should understand the cost of each warrant article as it pertains to their tax bill, as well be provided the actual final vote count of the budget committee on each article. If you do not care to have this additional information provided, vote “No” on this article. If you would like this additional information provided, vote “Yes” on this article.