

A SPECIAL MESSAGE TO PARENTS

The Acton Voters Group is proposing that we use some excess reserve funds to keep taxes level with last year. This would result in a 4.1% reduction from the planned increase. The average single-family household will save about \$320 this year if the proposal passes, and **no** current-year budgets will be affected. Remaining reserve levels will be healthy (over \$5 million) and above Massachusetts Department of Revenue guidelines.

We know many families need tax relief, especially in this economy with job uncertainty and loss of value in investments and housing. But since parents have a special investment in the community, we wanted to make sure they understood the risks our town officials are willing to take and how supporting those decisions could affect all of Acton's residents.

We started this campaign back in July, and since then, we have heard from many town officials that they don't support our proposal, despite evidence of strong general voter support based on our gathering over 1,700 signatures on our petition for the Special Town Meeting. Many voters are concerned about Acton's tax burden.

Most town officials are dedicated volunteers who are trying to do what is best for the town. But in this instance, they are misguided. They are supporting a three-year Plan (published in the Town Warrant) that is extremely risky for Acton's families and the schools. First, **it would use most of Acton's reserves to fund a budget deficit.**

Second, if the plan proceeds, **this deficit will require a multi-million dollar Override** to balance in the third year. We don't feel the community can afford to support such an effort, based on the economic situation and the fact that two large overrides have been approved in the last few years. Taxes in Acton are already among the highest in the state. Therefore, relying on passing an Override as Acton officials are doing is **risky** and could hurt the schools by forcing large budget reductions in a single year if the Override fails. And our town would be left with almost no reserves at that time, leaving few acceptable options.

If we act soon, we still have time to reduce projected spending levels. But if we wait for the town officials' Plan to unfold, the budget deficit will grow so large that small adjustments to spending will no longer be enough to balance the budget, and an Override will be the only option. This is a dangerous gamble that has no upside. While a positive override vote will avert disaster, it will also mean a very large and unaffordable tax increase for many citizens.

While we can't predict the future, we can look at the past. This same strategy of "spend to the max" using town reserves and then requesting a large Override was employed twice in the last six years. The last Override in 2005 was for \$3.8 million. There is a pattern emerging and we need to break this cycle. Otherwise, we will be faced with another divisive Override battle. Because of this history, the excess reserves should be returned to taxpayers rather than being spent by town officials. And moving forward, we offer another option that is fiscally responsible.

Please visit our website at www.ActonVotersGroup.com. Our three-year alternative is online and is in the Town Warrant. It differs from town officials' plans in three major ways: It **protects the reserves; it does not use reserves to fund recurring operating expenses;** and there is no budget deficit and **no Overrides** on the horizon.

This is accomplished by controlling spending growth to a sustainable and reasonable level. There are several ways to accomplish this goal, but the underlying assumption is very simple: We cannot deficit spend. We cannot spend more than our available recurring revenue. If spending does not exceed revenues, the "books balance" (no surprise.)

We are not saying that our Plan must be implemented. We offer it as a way to balance future budgets and protect the schools without resorting to risky actions. There is time to debate the merits and make changes. Budgets will be determined over the next six months by our town boards. Ultimately, we will see if by next April our town officials have managed to balance the budgets. But you can send a signal to our officials that deficit spending is too risky a gamble and support our effort to have reasonable budget growth and not *plan* for overrides.

Come to the Special Town Meeting on **October 2** and vote **YES** to stop the deficit spending and protect the schools by avoiding risky Overrides. Listen to all the facts and make an informed choice at the Special Town Meeting.