



**TOWN OF LENOX**  
6 Walker Street, Lenox, MA 01240  
www.townoflenox.com

Christopher J. Ketchen,  
Town Manager

April 29, 2024

To the voters of Lenox:

On Thursday, May 2, 2024, the Annual Town Meeting will be held in the Duffin Theater at Lenox Memorial Middle High School. Upon notification that a quorum is present, Town Moderator John McNinch will call the meeting to order at 7 PM, or shortly thereafter.

There is information available in the Town Clerk's office and on the Town of Lenox website:

<https://www.townoflenox.com/town-clerk/pages/annual-town-meeting-and-annual-town-election>

This link will provide you with materials relevant to the upcoming Annual Town Meeting, including:

- Official Town Meeting Warrant
- Finance Committee FY25 budget letter
- Town Meeting Amendment Form

You may find this material helpful in your preparations for Town Meeting.

#### A BRIEF PRIMER ON 2024 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING PROCEEDINGS

Town Meeting begins with the call to order, delivered by the Town Moderator (mentioned above). At Town Meeting, the Moderator's goal is to conduct proceedings expeditiously yet impartially, allowing a fair hearing for all points of view while keeping the process moving. During the proceedings, the Moderator recognizes people from the floor and, while they are speaking, allows no interruptions except under certain procedural circumstances. Speakers are asked to address the Moderator and identify themselves for the record by name and address before speaking (for example: "Mr. Moderator, Jane Doe, 789 Main Street, Lenox"). Elected or appointed officials, when speaking in their capacity as a Town official may further identify themselves as such.

Procedure at Town Meeting generally follows those rules commonly understood and known as "Robert's Rules" – though not precisely and always in deference to the Moderator's judgment. The current Town Moderator makes use of *Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law* as a guiding text for conducting the meeting. However, as a matter of first principle, the Moderator is charged with keeping order at Town Meetings, and, as such, procedural rulings are final.

Non-voters wishing to address Town Meeting may do so upon the consent of at least 10 eligible voters in attendance. For voters wishing to amend motions on the floor at Town Meeting, a Form can be obtained from the Town Clerk or downloaded from the Town website, as mentioned earlier in this letter. Amendment Forms are also available at Town Meeting. The Moderator has indicated that all floor amendments (if any) must be submitted in writing.

Those seeking more information on Town Meeting procedures may consult the referenced texts above or contact my office.

**The following provides a brief description of each article contained in the warrant and a short narrative of the anticipated action on each at Town Meeting:**

ARTICLE 1 – READING WAIVER AND 2/3 DECLARATION FROM MODERATOR

This article serves two purposes:

1. to waive the reading of the warrant and return of service; and
2. to authorize the Moderator to declare a 2/3 voice vote.

In an effort to be efficient, the Moderator will call for voice votes whenever possible. However, electronic voting will be available, if needed. Eligible voters at the meeting also retain the ability to call for a hand count if at least 7 voters challenge the Moderator’s declaration.

ARTICLE 2 – APPROPRIATION – MUNICIPAL GENERAL FUND OPERATING BUDGET

This article is sponsored by the Select Board with the unanimous approval of the Finance Committee. These appropriations require a simple majority vote to pass.

This article, totaling just under \$9.5 million, represents the General Fund operating budget requests for each department in Fiscal Year 2025 (excluding the schools). Overall, the entire budget (i.e. Articles 2-13 plus non-appropriated obligations) would require a 6.75% increase in the total levy which translates into an estimated 5.6% increase in single-family tax bills as a result of estimated new growth (i.e. property being taxed for the first time). The final tax rate is typically set in December.

Specific to the appropriations in this article, some of the more significant changes include:

- Town Buildings – The increase to Town Buildings reflects the inclusion of the Facilities Director position within the General Government category. Currently, this position is being funded through the Public Works organization and various capital project accounts. This position, along with other increases in materials and equipment resources, represents an important investment in the Town’s building assets.
- Board of Health – The 25% increase is attributable to the continued expansion of services within the Tri-Town Health Department – a shared department between the towns of Lenox, Lee, and Stockbridge. Mostly constituted by wages, recent work by the Board

has indicated that the pay structure for required skill sets is inadequate. The increase in assessments to the three-member towns will rectify this deficiency.

- Compensation Reserve – This line item is up from FY2024. This reserve account must be adequately funded to account for wage increases resulting from upcoming negotiations with the fire department union and fund the results of a compensation/reclassification analysis (also upcoming). There is also a need to replenish the component of the fund that pays for compensated absences when employees retire and/or resign with vacation/sick leave balances.
- Police – The increase in the Police Department budget is primarily driven by the addition of one new police officer. The budget also increases to meet contractual obligations within the existing collective bargaining agreement.

#### ARTICLE 3 – APPROPRIATION – SCHOOLS GENERAL FUND OPERATING BUDGET

This article has been placed on the warrant by the Select Board to support the appropriation request of the School Committee to fund the FY2025 operating budget of the Lenox Public Schools. The Select Board (5-0) and the Finance Committee (6-0) unanimously approve this appropriation request. This appropriation requires a simple majority vote to pass.

The FY2025 appropriation request for the Lenox Public Schools is \$16,855,665– which is a 8.46% increase over the current fiscal year. It is also valuable to note that this appropriation merely reflects the General Fund component of the school operating budget. In this way, the appropriation for the school department is unlike many of those departments funded under Article 2. The total (gross) school budget of \$19,174,165 is supplemented by choice revenue and other sources. Representatives of the School Committee and administration will be present at Town Meeting should voters have any specific questions. There is also budget information through the Lenox Public Schools website: <https://www.lenoxps.org/documents/local-governance/budget/534284>.

#### ARTICLE 4 – APPROPRIATION – SEWER ENTERPRISE FUND OPERATING/CAPITAL

This article is sponsored by the Select Board with the unanimous approval of the Finance Committee. This appropriation requires a simple majority vote to pass.

Unlike General Fund appropriations under Articles 2 and 3, appropriations relating to the Town’s two enterprise funds (articles 4 and 5) are fully supported by water and sewer receipts, respectively. Article 4 presents the Sewer Department budget (operating, debt service, and capital). Its appearance in the warrant follows a format mirroring the submission requirements of the state’s Division of Local Services for approval purposes. Town Meeting will see here an accounting for the estimated activity in the sewer enterprise fund in one article, which requests \$2,077,492 for Fiscal Year 2025. You will note that the use of retained earnings (\$220,000) does not exceed the capital expenditures request (\$220,000). Therefore, it can be stated that operating costs and debt are fully supported by rates with no use of reserves to cover ongoing expenses.

ARTICLE 5 – APPROPRIATION – WATER ENTERPRISE FUND OPERATING/CAPITAL

This article is sponsored by the Select Board with the unanimous approval of the Finance Committee. This appropriation requires a simple majority vote to pass.

This article presents the Water Department budget (operating, debt service, and capital). In the same manner as the Sewer Department (Article 4), its appearance in the warrant follows a format mirroring the submission requirements of the state’s Division of Local Services for approval purposes. Town Meeting will see here an accounting for the estimated activity in the water enterprise fund in one article, which requests \$1,588,907 for Fiscal Year 2025. You will note that the use of retained earnings (\$62,000) is tied to the line for cash capital expenditures (also \$62,000). Therefore, it can be stated that operating costs and debt are fully supported by rates with no use of reserves to cover ongoing expenses.

ARTICLE 6 – STATE AID ACCEPTANCE – ROAD REPAIR AND PAVING (CHAPTER 90)

This article is sponsored by the Select Board. Recommending the acceptance of funds requires a simple majority vote to pass.

Each year the Commonwealth allocates transportation funds designated for local use to repair and pave roadways and related public works infrastructure (“Chapter 90” funds). The amount allocated to Lenox by the Commonwealth is anticipated to be approximately \$275,000 in FY2025. These funds will be available to aid the Town’s ongoing paving efforts.

ARTICLE 7 – APPROPRIATION – OMNIBUS GENERAL FUND CAPITAL BUDGET

This article is sponsored by the Select Board with the unanimous approval of the Finance Committee. These appropriations require a simple majority vote to pass.

Most of the FY2025 capital outlay requests from the various departments are consolidated into this warrant article. This article proposes to fund cash capital spending for facilities, equipment, and other town assets. This capital appropriation is funded out of undesignated reserves (so-called, “Free Cash”) in the amount of \$1,308,000. The goal here is to present Town Meeting with as much of the Town’s capital expenditure effort by department in one place (minus those projects requiring borrowing, special stabilization, and/or enterprise funds). As with Article 2, each departmental request is listed in the warrant and will be read aloud by a member of the Select Board assigned to move the motion at Town Meeting before the final vote.

ARTICLE 8 – APPROPRIATION – LENOX MEMORIAL MIDDLE HIGH SCHOOL

This article has been placed on the warrant by the Select Board to support a request of the School Committee to fund a feasibility study for classroom expansion at Lenox Memorial Middle High School. The appropriation request is \$200,000 to be funded out of “Free Cash”. Study findings are expected to be reported at a subsequent Town Meeting as early as November. The Select Board (5-0) and the Finance Committee (6-0) unanimously approve of this appropriation request. This appropriation requires a simple majority vote to pass.

ARTICLE 9 – APPROPRIATION – COMMUNITY PRESERVATION FUND

This article is sponsored by the Community Preservation Committee (CPC). This appropriation requires a simple majority vote to pass.

Article 9 presents the Committee’s requests for specific project appropriations and annual reservations in a single, consolidated warrant article. A representative from the Community Preservation Committee will make a motion under each of these articles and answer questions at Town Meeting.

ARTICLE 10 – APPROPRIATION – FIRE ENGINE STABILIZATION FUND

This article is sponsored by the Select Board with the unanimous approval of the Finance Committee. This appropriation requires a simple majority vote to pass.

This appropriation – \$175,000 – would continue the Town’s annual contribution to the replacement fund for fire apparatus. The current balance in the fund is \$915,019. The fund's purpose is to save for the replacement of fire/rescue vehicles so that future purchases can be made with available funds on hand instead of borrowing.

ARTICLE 11 – APPROPRIATION – AMBULANCE STABILIZATION FUND

This article is sponsored by the Select Board with the unanimous approval of the Finance Committee. This appropriation requires a simple majority vote to pass.

Like Article 10, the appropriation under this article – \$50,000 – would continue the Town’s annual contribution to the replacement fund for ambulances. The current balance in the fund is \$102,433. The fund's purpose is to save for the replacement of ambulances so that future purchases can be made with available funds on hand instead of borrowing.

ARTICLE 12 – APPROPRIATION – LIBRARY BUILDING CAPITAL

This article is sponsored by the Select Board with the unanimous approval of the Finance Committee. This appropriation requires a two-thirds supermajority vote to pass.

This appropriation of \$250,000 will allow the Town to perform additional capital work at the Lenox Library for much-needed structural, masonry, systems, and drainage improvements. It does so by expanding the scope of a prior appropriation already approved by Town Meeting in 2021. Therefore, there is no tax impact resulting from this article beyond what has already been approved.

ARTICLE 13 – APPROPRIATION – PRIOR YEAR UNEMPLOYMENT EXPENSE

This article was placed on the warrant by the Select Board at the request of the Town Manager with the unanimous approval of the Finance Committee. Prior year bill appropriations require a four-fifths supermajority vote to pass.

During the pandemic, the Town furloughed approximately a third of its municipal staff as a cost-saving measure. Many of those employees qualified to receive unemployment benefits. One of those invoices arrived long after the closing of the fiscal year in which costs were incurred. Under Chapter 44, Section 64 of the Massachusetts General Laws, Town Meeting must approve and appropriate funds for prior year bills where no reservation exists to pay said bill. This requires a four-fifths vote at an Annual Town Meeting (or nine-tenths vote at a Special Town Meeting).

ARTICLE 14 – ELECTION NOTICE

This article appears on the warrant as a notice of the Town election on Monday, May 6<sup>th</sup> – reiterating the first page of the warrant. There is no motion required under this article. It merely appears as a formal notice of the election.

I hope you find the above explanations useful in your preparation for Town Meeting. As has been the case for the last 10 years, it has truly been an honor to serve the citizens of Lenox as your Town Manager. On behalf of the dedicated public servants that make up our Town government, thank you for your time and we look forward to seeing you at the Duffin Theater on Thursday.

Sincerely,



Christopher J. Ketchen, ICMA-CM  
Town Manager