

LETTER FROM THE TOPSFIELD FINANCE COMMITTEE

February 26, 2018

It was a pleasure to see many people attend the 1/24/18 forum on the FY19 budget process, and we hope many more are watching the video replay on local cable. As most of you know, there are several challenges facing Topsfield and most other local governments, that make it an increasingly difficult task to offer the level of services the residents expect, while keeping our taxes as low as possible.

Like many New England Towns, we are fortunate to be governed by a unique New England Institution - Town Meeting - which is still considered to be one of the purest examples of democratic government. As you know, all voters present at the Annual Town Meeting act as the legislative body of the Town. Very little can happen in Topsfield until you, the residents of Topsfield, place your vote at Town Meeting and at the polls.

Coming up with a balanced budget to be presented and potentially approved at Town Meeting is a complicated process that takes place every year from December through May. This process is made up of a litany of meetings of the various boards, committees and teams across Town, including the Board of Selectmen (elected by the residents), Finance Committee (appointed by the Town Moderator, who is elected by the residents), other elected boards and committees and Town department heads and staff. It is important to keep in mind that the Finance Committee does not control how or when our Town spends its money. The Finance Committee reviews the budgets requested by Town departments and elected officials, and acts as a check and balance to ensure that the overall budget is balanced, and advises Town Meeting by making recommendations on all matters placed before Town meeting on a Warrant prepared by the Board of Selectmen.

All of the members of the Finance Committee take their responsibilities to review the budget and to the community very seriously and invest a significant amount of time and effort to consider all the issues and potential solutions. We each come from a different background and field of expertise that is applicable to the financial matters of the Town, and often have very differing opinions on the specific matters. We pride ourselves in working through the challenges together, and we always try to do what is best for Topsfield. Our goal is to find ways to offer the services expected from the residents of our Town in a fiscally responsible manner while keeping our taxes as low as possible. Every year, our Budget Guidelines express in writing that we are targeting the maintenance of "Essential Town Services" and that "New Program" initiatives will not be considered.

Regardless of differences of opinion, the Finance Committee knows that all Topsfield residents are *ALL TAXPAYERS*. We would like to publicly express our deep concern and disappointment in the tone and divisiveness that some in our community have chosen to take in an effort to get their opinions heard. Topsfield - we are better than this as a community, and common decency must prevail. We should expect and demand more from ourselves, family members and friends, and we ask that starting today, our community stops using the non-productive rhetoric of

disparagement. LET'S treat each other with mutual respect; LET'S come together as a community; LET'S understand each other's concerns; LET'S find ways to get involved; and LET'S engage in healthy, respectful and productive discussions so we can TOGETHER find solutions to these challenges.

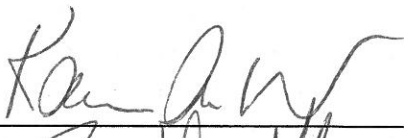
Attending the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee meetings is a great way to see the process unfold. At these meetings you will: learn as new information becomes available; hear various departments and groups express the merits of their needs; listen to the Selectmen and Finance Committee members express their concerns and ask numerous questions; watch the drafting of the Warrant; and hear the deliberation of the Finance Committee as it works towards its recommendations. That said, each Town department comes up with its own budget, which is reviewed, debated and approved by either the Board of Selectmen or its own elected supervisory board. All of these elected supervisory board meetings are Open Meetings, and are an even better way to understand the complexities of the debate and to ensure your voices, concerns, questions and solutions are heard throughout the process. Please keep in mind that there is a vast amount of detailed and helpful information made publicly available on the Town's website, each department's and committee's page, as well as the websites for the Elementary School and Masconomet. While the complexity of the process makes it challenging to understand the underlying data and how all of the pieces come together, the Finance Committee will do its best to get the necessary information out in the community in a clear manner so our residents can make informed decisions at Town Meeting and at the polls.

Topsfield -- described on our Town website as "our small rural town with a strong sense of community nestled in the North Shore ... with our running rivers and rolling hills" -- is near and dear to each and every one of us here this evening. Let's focus on this common bond that links us together to preserve what we have and to make Topsfield even better.

Sincerely,

The Topsfield Finance Committee

Karen Dow, Chairman



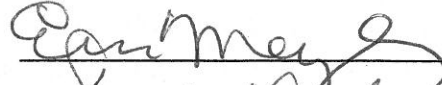
Jonathan Guido, Member



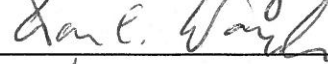
Che Elwell, Member



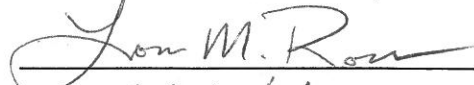
Eric Menzer, Member



Dana Warren, Member



Louis Ross, Member



Michael Hartmann, Member

