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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Nice work as always, Lauren. Just minor style adjustments and time references, given that we're publishing it a week later. —J

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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 Marlboro eyes school closure amid declining enrollment

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#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

2 School anticipates 47 students in pre-K through grade 8

3 in 2026-27

#####END SUBHED#####

4 TEXT BODY:

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5 At a special meeting held on Nov. 20, the Marlboro
6 School Board told gathered public that in the coming months, it
7 will hold an Australian ballot vote in which the district's voters
8 will be asked to determine the future of its school.

9 The move comes as the board acknowledges that, facing
10 declining enrollment, the town cannot continue to operate its
11 school as it stands currently.

12 The options currently being considered by the board are
13 a full closure, which would give the town's school-aged residents
14 school choice, or "pared-down" operations, which would limit
15 the school's enrollment to those in second through eighth grades.
16 Pre-K, kindergarten, and first grade students would have school
17 choice.

18 Under that scenario, programming, such as the school's
19 band, would also be cut.

20 The board was careful to say that nothing is set in stone.
21 "The purpose of this meeting tonight is to explore the options and
22 to inform ourselves of what the effects of them would be on our
23 taxes," said board Chair Dan MacArthur.

24 Demographic charts shared by Windham Central
25 Supervisory Union Superintendent Bob Thibault and Director of
26 Finance Heidi Russ showed that if nothing were to change, the
27 district anticipates 47 students would be enrolled next year in
28 Marlboro, which currently serves students in pre-K through grade
29 8.

30 Among those 47, projected numbers for the youngest
31 grades are particularly low, with two 3-year-olds, two 4-year-olds,
32 and three kindergarteners aging into their respective classes.

33 The school, said MacArthur, can't afford to hire staff to
34 support classrooms that small, nor would classes that small
35 necessarily be what's best for students. Some families, said
36 principal Dana Gordon-Macey, chose different options this year
37 because the kindergarten class was already so small.

38 "The big issue is the birth rate," said Gordon-Macey. "It's
39 just not sustainable classroom sizes, and when we talk about
40 wanting to do what's best for our kids, they need to have a
41 cohort, and those much younger kids don't have any sort of a
42 cohort, which is very challenging."

43 Russ said that if the school were to close and tuition out
44 its students, taxes would be anticipated to rise by about \$1 per
45 \$100,000 of home value next year.

46 But if the school were to continue operating for grades
47 two through eight, the supervisory union would anticipate a tax
48 hike of about \$439 per \$100,000 of home value. That number
49 was translated within the meeting to roughly \$1,200 on a
50 \$300,000 home, with attendees saying the number was more
51 relatable to the average homeowner.

52 Closure of the school would mean its projected 47
53 students would need to pick a different regional school to attend
54 next year. Thibault said that of the nearby schools he contacted,
55 most said they had the ability to absorb Marlboro's students.

56 "Because there are declining enrollments everywhere, it's
57 not just a Marlboro problem; not surprisingly, everybody around
58 us said, 'Yeah, we have room,'" said Thibault. "In fact, most of the
59 schools said they could completely accept the entirety of
60 Marlboro School and just keep rolling."

61 Parents' and residents' responses at the meeting were
62 mixed when remarking about what might be the best-case
63 scenario in a situation none seemed glad to find themselves in.

64 Some parents said they would be willing to pay extra
65 taxes, despite the significant burden it would bring them, if it
66 meant allowing some of the school's students an extra year in
67 their school while the board and town figure out what's best to do
68 next.

69 Others said doing so would be prolonging the inevitable
70 and would cause an undue burden on staff and students.

71 **'This is not an Act 73 knee-jerk 72 reaction'**

73 MacArthur has cumulatively served on the Marlboro
74 School Board for about 35 years, with a bulk of that time when

75 his own children were in the school. After a break, he returned
76 about 10 years ago.

77 In recent interview, MacArthur said that the current
78 conversations around closing the school are not strictly related to
79 Act 73, this year's landmark education bill. But the 2025 law
80 does throw some complications into the future in Marlboro.

81 For example, the law dictates that multigrade classrooms
82 can comprise only two grades at a time, meaning that even if it
83 thought it was what was best, the school could not combine its
84 low-student-count pre-K, kindergarten, and first-grade classrooms
85 into one.

86 Still, MacArthur said, the difficult conversations in
87 Marlboro are not tied to Act 73, but rather are about the town's
88 dwindling demographics.

89 "This is something we recognize within our community,
90 and that's why we're trying to engage the community and make
91 the decision as an independent school district," said MacArthur.
92 "This is not an Act 73 knee-jerk reaction. This is something that
93 the community recognizes needs to happen."

94 MacArthur, who attended the school himself and whose
95 children and grandchildren attended it as well, said the school
96 has always been one of progressive thinking and, owing to its
97 small size, has long had an intimacy to it. It's clear in talking to
98 him that the conversations he's engaged in now are not without
99 grief or sadness.

100 He lauded members of the public for the way they
101 engaged during Thursday night's meeting, the tone of which was
102 cordial and practical, if not reflective of a certain type of grief.
103 MacArthur relayed one comment from the meeting that
104 particularly moved him.

105 "A person stood up and said basically, with all that's
106 happening in the world, we've got to keep our act together here,"
107 said MacArthur. "Because where else is there sanity in the world,
108 other than this group of people in this room trying to deal with
109 what we've got going on? I really appreciated her."

110 At the public meeting, Gordon-Macey said that despite
111 the difficult conversations swirling around it, the school remains
112 dedicated to its students and to upholding the spirit of the school.

113 "It is as magical a place here at Marlboro as it always has
114 been," said Gordon-Macey. "I don't know what the future holds,
115 but I do want folks to know that this is a place to celebrate today
116 as much as it was to celebrate 10 years ago or 20 years ago.

117 "Our kids are really lucky to be here," she said.

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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118 A version of this story appeared in [The Deerfield Valley](#)
119 [News](#), [The Commons'](#) sister newspaper.

#####END BIO/COATTAIL#####

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