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Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Halifax resuscitates reserve fund for ‘inevitable
2 challenges’

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3 Voters approve town and school budgets and
4 conversations over a homemade lunch

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5 TEXT BODY:

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6 An early March snow coated the ground around the
7 Halifax Elementary School. Meanwhile, inside the school’s
8 gymnasium, Halifax voters gathered for Annual Town Meeting,
9 wrapped in savory scents rising from an army of slow cookers on
10 standby for the lunch break.

11 Voters took approximately 90 minutes to consider 11
12 articles during the meeting's municipal portion. All the articles
13 passed as presented.

14 Among the decisions, voters approved \$30,000 to
15 replenish the Operational Reserve Fund, which covers disaster
16 expenses; they eliminated the Town Auditor's Office (again); and
17 they passed a \$2.64 million school budget.

18 **'We need to shore ourselves** 19 **up'**

20 The town established the Operational Reserve Fund after
21 Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 caused millions in damage.

22 Selectboard Chair Edee Edwards explained that state and
23 federal funds eventually paid for the repairs in 2011, but said the
24 town would need to prepare for the future disasters. The town
25 had not refilled the fund since an ice storm depleted its \$60,000
26 balance several years ago.

27 "We need to shore ourselves up for the inevitable
28 challenges we have as a small town," Edwards said.

29 Voters also approved establishing a Highway Equipment
30 Purchase Reserve Fund, seeded with \$20,000, with a goal of
31 saving money by paying for new equipment up front. Halifax has
32 historically financed its equipment through debt.

33 Other money articles included:

34 • The Selectboard and Highway Fiscal Year 2027 budget
35 of \$2.5 million.

36 • The treasurer's budget, which included salary and
37 collection of current taxes at \$20,500, plus an additional \$4,000
38 to cover expenses.

39 • \$28,000 to fund contract recycling bin drop-off and
40 pick up.

41 • \$20,165 was authorized to fund requests from 17
42 human service organizations serving residents.

Auditor office removed

Voters unanimously decided to eliminate the office of town auditor. A public accountant will handle future financial audits.

According to Edwards, Halifax has ping-ponged between authorizing the Auditor's Office and dismantling it. In 2021, Town Meeting voted to eliminate the office. In 2022, voters reversed their decision. In 2023, no one ran for the three open auditor seats. A write-in candidate chose not to take the oath of office, Edwards said.

The Selectboard resorted to appointing auditors in 2024 and 2025 when the seats were, once again, left empty. The lack of auditors eventually led to the Town possessing incomplete financial audits.

Selectboard Vice Chair and Road Commissioner Karen Christofferson added that banks and grant organizations often require professional financial audits as part of their approval process. Over time, the gaps in Halifax's financial records have cost the town money.

School budget passes

After the lunch break, the School Board took the podium with first-time School Moderator Cara Cheyette overseeing proceedings for the small handful of voters who remained.

The Halifax Town School Fiscal Year 2027 budget of \$2.64 million passed with a unanimous voice vote. According to the meeting warning, this budget will result in per-pupil spending of \$13,207, which is 3.63% higher than this year.

Voters also approved establishing a Tax Stabilization Fund and shifting \$190,000 from the surplus fund balance to the new stabilization fund.

School Board Chair Paul Blais said the board believes it has done the work necessary to keep this year's education taxes even. Next year, however, is uncertain.

76 "We want to make sure we have some money in the
77 bank, so to speak," to level off tax spikes, he said.

78 If statewide education changes lead to Halifax
79 Elementary consolidating with another school district, Blais
80 expects any monies in the Tax Stabilization Fund will remain in
81 Halifax.

82 The remaining community members helped put away
83 tables and chairs before trudging out into the several inches of
84 snow that had fallen throughout the morning.

85 Edwards pulled on her hat and said she looked forward
86 to taking a few laps on her cross-country skis around the school's
87 athletic field before heading home.

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