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Capital projects to dominate Wellfleet town meeting - April 23rd

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Town leaders have capital improvements on their mind. At the annual town meeting April 23rd, a balanced total budget of \$17.5 million for the next fiscal year will be presented to voters for approval. But a subset of the budget, \$420,946 in capital improvement projects, has drawn the finance committee's attention.

Overall, the town needs to better manage the long-term planning for capital projects to avoid "emergency" funding situations, the finance committee said. The committee is working with town manager Paul Sieloff to develop a 10-year plan, rather than a five-year plan, for paying predictable capital expenses.

For fiscal years 2014 through 2018, for example, town departments have requested \$6.5 million in capital items, which the committee calls a "challenge" to handle without burdening taxpayers too much.

"We do have a very proactive list of projects that we're trying to move forward," Sieloff said. "We're doing a lot of medium-size maintenance projects to prevent them from becoming bigger problems down the road."

At this town meeting, selectmen are recommending three Proposition 2½ debt exclusions totaling \$1.68 million. Article 17 seeks \$590,000 for new sidewalks and paving of Bank and Commercial streets, to fix damage from a stormwater drainage project and continue beautification efforts from the center of town to the harbor.

Article 18 requests \$790,000 to build public composting restrooms at Mayo Beach and Baker's Field to replace portable toilets in use now.

Article 19 requests \$300,000 to build more municipal offices to house the health, conservation and building departments. The move allows the town to address air-quality issues in the building that currently houses that staff, Sieloff said.

The three Proposition 2½ debt exclusion articles would need to be approved at town meeting and at the town election April 30th. If all three articles passed, the extra property taxes for the first year for real estate valued at \$486,450 would be around \$73, town records show.

The town is also proposing in Article 20, through a petition to the state Legislature, to raise revenues by expanding the local room occupancy tax to all seasonal rentals. This would broaden the current tax from traditional lodging businesses such as motels and larger inns to homeowners who rent their places for 90 consecutive days or fewer. The tax would not exceed 5% of the rent.

In an informal survey that selectman Berta Bruinooge, vice chairwoman of the board of selectmen, conducted last year on an Internet site that advertises vacation rentals, she found 258 Wellfleet houses available.

In articles 12 through 16, the community preservation committee will recommend the use of

\$430,500 in Community Preservation Act money for a number of purposes: to finance a low-income housing program; preserve historical records; renovate a wing of the Wellfleet Historic Museum; purchase a conservation restriction for four acres on Old County Road; and restore the town-owned Cannon Hill and Hamblen Park trails and vistas.

In one other financial article, Article 10, voters will be asked to set aside \$100,000 to help pay for future municipal retirees' benefits, such as health insurance.

Articles 24 and 33 would help Wellfleet qualify as a "green" community under a state designation that would open up grant opportunities for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Article 24, a zoning amendment, allows the installation of large-scale solar photovoltaic arrays in at least one zoning district by right.

Petitioned Article 33, on which the selectmen reserve recommendation, would have the town adopt a "stretch energy code" to raise the energy efficiency standards of new construction.

Article 31, which has divided the selectmen, would make the town clerk/treasurer position an appointed rather than an elective position. The issue has arisen because the incumbent, Dawn Rickman, plans to retire next year after more than 30 years on the job, Sieloff said.

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