



"WARRANT LITE" VOTER GUIDE

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Town Budget Lines

What went up? What went down? We only include lines here that have either increased or decreased and have *excluded school budgets* since these are a little too complicated to explain in just one line!

Department	↑↓	Explanation
135 Town Audits	↑	The town has audits performed every other year, and the cost for the last one was \$15,000; there are no quotes yet for the next audit, which will be for FY24; \$10,000 will be put into the account this year, and after receiving quotes the remainder will be added next year
141 Assessors	↑	Increases mostly due to costs of software for mapping and assessing as well as supplies such as toner
141 Assessors Wages	↓	Decrease reflects more accurate number of hours for staffing
145 Treasurer-Collector	↓	Decrease in amount of software support
145 Treasurer-Collector Wages	↑	Increase due to COLA
150 Town Administration	↓	Cuts to mileage, technical services, postage and offices supplies
150 Town Administration Wages	↑	Increase due to COLA and Fire Department clerical
151 Legal	↓	Reverted to FY22 budget amount
159 Information Technology	↑	Annual licensing fee increases from tech vendors for software & services
161 Town Clerk	↑	Increased need for software support
161 Town Clerk Wages	↓	Reflects mistake made in FY23 budget now corrected
163 Elections	↑	Increased stipends and software support
171 Conservation Commission	↑	Increase for more training
175 Planning Board	↑	Increase for more advertising
176 Zoning Board of Appeals	↑	Increase for more trainings
192 Building Maintenance	↑	Cost of mowing ballfields and commons has more than doubled
193 Town Insurance	↑	Reflects regular increases
210 Police	↑	Increase in dues, software and vehicle maintenance
210 Police Wages	↑	Reflects COLA for officers
220 Fire	↓	Decrease in radio fees
220 Fire Wages	↓	Decrease is because clerical now covered under Town Administration budget
292 Animal Control	↑	Town joined the FCSO Animal Control program after an inability to identify a local animal control officer
294 Tree Warden	↑	Now includes the cost of advertising for Shade Tree hearings
422 Highway	↑	Increased cost of fuel and materials—see special Highway Budget Notes at town meeting
422 Highway wages	↑	Increase due to COLA
423 Snow & Ice	↑	Increased cost of fuel, salt and sand
423 Snow & Ice Wages	↑	Increase due to COLA
433 Transfer Station	↑	Increased due to cost of recycling at the Springfield Materials Recycling Facility in Springfield; this cost was omitted last year
433 Transfer Station Wages	↑	Increase due to COLA
512 Board of Health	↓	Decrease reflects reduction in supplies line
512 Board of Health Wages	↓	Decrease reflects more accurate number of hours for staffing
543 Veterans	↓	This budget varies depending upon the number of veterans covered by the Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans Association who live in Conway
750-752 Debt Service, Interest, etc.	↑	These are the town's payments for the Highway Facility and paving of Shelburne Falls Road
830 FRCOG	↑	Reflects regular increases
900 Employee Costs	↑	Increased costs in retirement and health benefits

Articles — Each of these is asking “Should the town...?”

3. **Have the legal authority to set the salaries of elected officials?** Boilerplate language recommended by town counsel.

4. **Support the establishment of a capital stabilization fund for Frontier Regional School District?** We have one for the Grammar School and for the town itself. A capital stabilization fund for Frontier would allow all of the contributing towns to set money aside annually for capital projects so that we're all prepared for large capital expenditures in the future. A capital stabilization fund will allow Frontier Regional to create a dedicated account to save for future major capital projects. E & D/free cash, other available unrestricted funds and/or budgeted monies may be used as a funding source. The goal of the fund would be to reduce capital assessments to the Town by creating a transparent "savings account".

5. **Pay for a new stage curtain for the Grammar School?** The Grammar School was required to remove the stage curtain years ago due to its age, and because there were no records of it actually being fire retardant. The school has been without a curtain since and it is time to replace it.

6 & 7. **Move money to pay for an addition to the Public Safety building?** The Highway Facility committee did such excellent work that they saved the town \$450K of what had been allocated. The town is now being asked to reallocate those savings to the proposed Public Safety Building

offices, along with the monies available in the special revenue fund Sales of Public Lands. Those funds, combined with the remaining ARPA funds, will likely cover the cost of the new office building.

8. **Move money to the Fire Truck Stabilization Fund in order to save up for a new pumper?** Chief Baker expects we will need a new pumper in approximately 5 years at a cost of at least \$600K. If we start saving now it will be a less painful purchase in 2028. (We voted yes on this last year.)
9. **Purchase a rubber tire compact loader for the Highway Department?** The current loader has over 16K of repair costs in the last 3 years. The loader is used on a near daily basis, has a 10 year life expectancy, and will be able to utilize all the current attachments already owned by the town. With a 38.4% municipal discount and a projected \$21,500 trade in value, the cost of a new loader is cheaper than that of a similar used loader and would have a warranty. The new loader would have rubber tires as opposed to tracks, which would offer more usability and lessen repair costs.
10. **Purchase a plow truck for the Highway Department?** The current main plow truck is over 120K miles and has needed nearly 25K in repairs over the past 3 years. The highway department staff uses a truck which was donated by Ron so staff doesn't have to use expensive trucks to do daily tasks and can be used by non-CDL drivers. Purchasing a new plow truck would allow our current main plow truck to be used as both a backup plow truck and daily use truck. The new truck would come with a 5 year bumper to bumper warranty and ensure we have adequate equipment for heavy snow falls like we received this past winter.
11. **Purchase a used boom lift for the Highway Department?** Purchasing this used boom lift will ensure a lift is always on hand when needed, and would eliminate the cost of travel time for staff to pick up and return the lift as well as the cost of the rental. Boom lifts have been rented as needed for the equivalent of three months annually for regular tree work in the past, but the need for a lift will increase given the Shade Tree Law requirements.
12. **Purchase a chipper w/ winch and chip box for the Highway Department?** There are increased responsibilities to the town due to the Shade Tree Law. Current rental agreement is a sweetheart deal utilizing a spare chipper from an owner that may reclaim the chipper whenever needed. That deal may end at any time and result in a typical rental fee of \$1,800/week for a similar chipper. Lead time for a new chipper would be approximately 1.5 years. Rates for equipment of this type are increasing every year. With the current sweetheart deal of \$2K/month, a new chipper would be equivalent to 46 months of rental. This is a large cost to capital in a fiscal year where growth does not account for large expenditures.
13. **Move money to the Ambulance Receipts Fund?** Every year the Ambulance Department's portion of Article 2 is an even \$25,000. The actual Ambulance Department budget is more than double that, so to make up the balance funds are transferred from the Ambulance Receipts fund.
14. **Pay the bill for paving Shelburne Falls Road?** In general it's a good idea for the town to pay its bills.
15. **Pay a portion of the costs of river bank repair on Delabarre Avenue?** These funds are needed to pay the engineering firm for their services. Unfortunately, due to Federal procurement laws, the town must pay directly and not use the grant award to pay for their services.
16. **Set limits/budgets for certain town funds?** Last year town meeting correctly changed its bylaws to outline certain revolving funds, their purposes and set the limits which may be expended from each revolving account. The town needs to approve this language annually for each of those revolving funds.
17. **Create a special fund to accept money due to the town from opioid litigation settlements?** The funds which the town is receiving from certain manufacturers due to legal settlements come to the town but go directly to the general fund, which would 'close out' to Free Cash every year and therefore not be properly accounted for. These payments will continue for 30+ years, and may only be expended on certain items. In order to properly keep track of those incoming funds and outgoing payments, a special account is necessary.
18. **Contribute money to the OPEB Trust Fund?** See glossary. Contributing annually to this fund for future town retirees is recommended by the state and also improves Conway's standing as being responsible in planning for the future.
19. **Make payments on our loan to build the Highway Garage?** When the town agreed to borrow funds for the Highway Facility it was agreed to take a certain amount annually from Free Cash to keep the debt amount relatively stable each year. This is that amount to be taken from Free Cash.
20. **Allow the Treasurer and Collector to enter into compensating balance agreements?** This is a required article which allows the Treasurer and Collector to enter into agreements with banking institutions, which is a basic function of the position. Technically a yes vote grants three years permission to do so; in reality rather than track this every three years, it is added annually to the warrant.
21. **Set aside funds for compensated absences?** This is paying out accrued vacation benefits. Without this fund the town could suddenly have to come up with a large amount of funds if an employee retires.
22. **Set aside funds to cover the cost of converting from one assessment software system to another?** The Board of Assessors has identified several ongoing issues with the software they currently use to determine property assessments, including a lack of transparency for property owners. An alternative, preferable system is an option, but it will cost money to convert data and implement the new platform.
23. **Set aside funds for future revaluation work?** We do this every year. State law requires that all property in the town be assessed within ten percent of market value every five years, so one third of the cost of the revaluation is set aside annually.
24. **Set aside funds for the Grant Match and Administration account?** This allows the town to provide a match for a grant if a grant application comes due outside the town meeting schedule for approval. The current account has \$8,350, so this would raise the amount of grant match available to \$13,350.
25. **Support our local library?** This is the least amount required to allow Field Memorial Library to participate in the state CW/MARS system.
26. **Rescind a previous vote to pay for bridge repair on North Poland Road?** A formality; we voted to appropriate \$330K for bridge repair at a previous town meeting, but the state has since put in a temporary bridge so the money is no longer needed. Yet.
27. **Allow the Selectboard to apply for grants?** A formality; allows the Selectboard to pursue any and all grants that don't explicitly require a town meeting vote or appropriation of town funds.

28. **Conclude the purchase of local property for flood plain remediation?** A previous town meeting authorized the town to acquire property for the purpose of flood plain remediation. The owners of the property in question each have a half interest, and have agreed to have the town acquire the property. However, the cost each owner would incur in legal fees alone if the town went through normal sales procedures is more than what the town would pay for the property and would not be worth it financially to the sellers. Therefore **each owner has requested** the town take the property by eminent domain. A yes vote will allow the town to take the property and pay out \$2,350 to each owner.

29. **Allocate CPA funds as follows?**

- A. Frontier Regional School tennis and pickleball court improvements
- B. Match a state grant application to study South River flooding and protection of the town center from flood events
- C. Allocate estimated FY 2024 CPA funds to various different lines

30. **Amend town bylaws to limit restrictions on personnel committee members?** A yes vote would eliminate the requirement that members of the personnel committee can not have been a town employee or elected official for three (3) years prior to service. Our personnel committee is currently inactive because we can't find enough volunteers who meet this threshold.

31. **Accept the provisions of MGL c. 39 sec 23D?** A yes vote allows acceptance of this provision, which allows members of boards, committees or commissions to miss one meeting of a hearing and still vote if the hearing is continued, after they abide by the required provisions of reviewing all testimony, minutes and evidence from the first meeting.

32. **Accept MGL c.44 sec. 53G and amend town bylaws?** A yes vote will allow any board, committee, officer or commission of the town to require fees be paid to compensate the town if outside expertise is necessary. In other words, if a technical ruling needs to be made on an application put before, for instance, the Conservation Commission, a outside consultant can be hired to aid the Conservation Commission in its decision, but the company making the application will be the one to pay for that technical expert or consultant.

33. **Allow greater flexibility in ownership of Adult Use Recreational Marijuana Establishments?** Currently cannabis permits automatically lapse upon a change in ownership or legal interest of more than 10%. A yes vote would instead require that businesses provide the town with the names and total number of all owners annually, regardless of change in ownership.

34. **Amend our zoning bylaws for wireless communication facilities?** Amendment includes requirements for newer technology being used and ensures the visual, environmental, and auditory impacts are kept to a minimum.

35. **Vote on a non-binding resolution to make Conway pollinator-friendly?**

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- **BOH** - Board of Health
- **COLA** - Cost of living adjustment
- **CPA** - Community Preservation Act - a 2000 law that helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing and develop outdoor recreational facilities through a surcharge of not more than 3% of the tax levy against real property
- **FCSO** - Franklin County Sheriff's Office
- **Free Cash** - funds the town 'receives back' which is certified annually in September. These funds come from what is not spent out of the previous year's budget, plus funds when revenues exceed what was predicted, among other sources.
- **FROG** - Franklin Regional Council of Governments - a regional service organization and the former county government, which was abolished in 1997 and re-established as a voluntary membership organization
- **MGL** - Massachusetts General Law
- **OPEB Trust Fund** - Other Post-Employment Benefits Liability Trust Fund - fund for town employee retirement benefits
- **Revolving fund** - a fund or account that remains available to finance a town's continuing operations without any fiscal year limitation
- **Stabilization fund** - a mechanism set up by governments to insulate budgets from large and unexpected expenditures, like capital improvements or purchases