



"WARRANT LITE" VOTER GUIDE

Non-partisan! Prepared by citizen volunteers! **YOU** can contribute next year!

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 Accounting	↓	Reduction in request for audit and last year there was a one-time software subscription
141 Assessors	↑	Increase in contract with RRG - Regional Resource Group
145 Treasurer-Collector	↑	Increase in postage and software
145 Treasurer-Collector Wages	↑	Increase in salary for new Treasurer/Tax Collector
150 Town Administration	↓	Decreased town report line
150 Town Administration Wages	↑	Increase in salary for Town Administrator and hours for Assistant to Town Administrator
151 Legal	↓	Last year more funds were needed to prepare for the North Poland bridge replacement
159 Information Technology	↑	Switching to a new technology company
161 Town Clerk	↓	Slight decrease; removed service call line
161 Town Clerk Wages	↑	Stipend increase
163 Elections	↓	Decrease in software line
163 Elections Wages	↓	There are not as many elections this year as there were last year
171 Conservation Commission	↑	This is the first year for stipends for members of the Conservation Commission
175 Planning Board	↑	This is the first year for stipends for members of the Planning Board
190 Personnel Committee	↓	Last year's budget included funds for a personnel handbook review
193 Town Insurance	↑	Always increases
210 Police	↑	Software increase
210 Police Wages	↑	Wage increases for both Police Chief (COLA) and part-time officers
220 Fire	↑	Equipment costs
220 Fire Wages	↑	COLA increases
291 Emergency Management	↑	Price for Blackboard Connect (town reverse 911) went up slightly
292 Animal Control	↑	Assessment from Sheriff's office increases annually
422 Highway	↓	Cost of materials down this year only as state disaster relief funds are being used this year
422 Highway Wages	↑	COLA and Highway Superintendent stipend for winter work
423 Snow & Ice Wages	↑	COLA increases
433 Transfer Station	↑	Increases in cost of trash, recycling and hauling charges. This would be a higher increase without the recent reduction in both trash and bulky tonnages
433 Transfer Station Wages	↑	Wage increases for TSAs
512 Board of Health	↓	Decrease in other supplies line
512 Board of Health Wages	↑	COLA increase
543 Veterans	↑	Increases in both benefits and assessment from Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans
630 Parks & Recreation	↑	Increase due to the need for handicapped accessible toilets in public places
691 Historical Commission	↑	Increase for supplies
710-751 Debt Service, Interest, etc.	↓	The paving note has been paid off!
830 FRCOG	↑	Increases in the costs for the FCCIP (inspection services) and highway services
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 (we do this every year).

4. 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.

5. Allow the Selectboard to apply for grants? Allows the Selectboard to pursue any and all grants that don't explicitly require a town meeting vote or appropriation of town funds. A YES vote means the town can apply for grants outside of town meeting; a NO vote means all grant applications have to be approved by town meeting vote.

6. Add funds to the CGS Stabilization Fund? A YES vote would increase the stabilization fund from \$236,776 to \$311,776. We anticipate needing to replace the boilers for the school in 2-3 years.

7. Add funds 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 2028 at a cost of at least \$800K (which continues to grow). Town has voted YES on this three (3) years in a row. A YES vote would increase the stabilization fund from \$313,480 to \$388,480.

8. Add funds to the Ambulance Stabilization Fund? A new ambulance will likely cost between \$410,000-\$450,000, which the Ambulance Department is hoping to purchase this calendar year. The current stabilization fund has \$340,961 and will go up to \$415,961 with a YES vote.

9. Create a Highway Stabilization Fund? To save up for highway department equipment in the same way we save for big-ticket items like a fire truck, ambulance, etc.

- 10. Add funds to the newly created Highway Stabilization Fund?** If article 9 passes.
- 11. Spend \$120,000 from the Capital Stabilization Fund on a highway excavator?** Current excavator is in fair condition, but any issue disrupts the schedule and delays projects. Replacing now reduces any major repairs and expenses due to maintenance. With current trade in value and purchase options, maximizing our return and investment is time sensitive.
- 12. Spend \$44,000 from the Capital Stabilization Fund on a highway tractor?** Size limitations due to snow blowing sidewalks maximize the use of the tractor, which also functions as a leaf blower and is heavily used for roadside mowing. Current hours are over 1,400. With current trade in value and purchase options, maximizing our return and investment is time sensitive.
- 13. Spend \$200,000 from our State Disaster Relief Funds on a used highway grader?** A new grader currently costs \$400,000. Renting one is problematic as every town is looking to rent one at the same time. Sharing one regionally has the same issue—who would get to use it when? There are enough funds leftover from the State Disaster Relief funds to pay for a used grader, and since the work left to do in town involves gravel roads which require a grader, it makes sense to try to purchase a used one.
- 14. Transfer \$52,000 from free cash to the Police Detail Special Revenue Fund?** The Police Detail Special Revenue Fund cannot by law run a deficit, so these funds are to cover while the town awaits payments from other towns and businesses for detail work performed by our officers. The town actually makes money from these details, it's simply that the fund can never go below zero, so police officers are paid immediately (from town funds); the town gets reimbursed anywhere from 30-90 days later.
- 15. Transfer funds from the Ambulance Receipts Fund to the Ambulance Department?** The Ambulance Receipts fund holds revenue generated by ambulance calls; this is just a technical vote to transfer that money back to the department to help cover operating expenses.
- 16. Transfer funds from the Grants Match and Administration General Fund to a separate account to pay for the printing and mailing of a Guide to Conway?** We plan to develop a handy welcome/how-to guide to the town to distribute to new residents; the grants match fund (established so the town admin can provide matching funds for grant applications in a timely manner if necessary) currently has a balance of \$18,500 and has not been used in the last three years.
- 17. 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.
- 18. Transfer funds from free cash to pay for tax title expenses?** The town can not legally add free cash to the tax title revolving fund so we need to create a new one in the general fund. Funds pay for registry filing fees, advertising fees and legal fees. Most of these fees are eventually collected from the taxpayer, but the town has to pay them up front.
- 19. Transfer funds from free cash to pay for our loan on the highway garage?** It's good to pay our debts. The town currently has \$750,052 left in principal and interest payments.
- 20. 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 a portion of the cost of the revaluation is set aside annually.
- 21. Support our local library?** This is the least amount required to allow Field Memorial Library to participate in the state CW/MARS system.
- 22. Authorize the spending limits on each of our revolving funds?** This currently has to be voted annually.
- 23. Migrate the town's electronic files to the cloud?** This is a one-time expense; three to five years ago, hard copy files on local servers were considered to be the standard, but now most governments and businesses have moved to cloud storage. Moving to cloud storage is a cost-effective way to use existing software tools we already pay for, eliminating the need to replace local hardware every few years. Benefits are automatic backups, enhanced security and cost-savings.
- 24. Transfer funds from a legacy grant fund to the Open Space Committee for implementing the town's open space and rec plan?** Years ago under a previous town administrator we were awarded \$43,419 under a "Small Cities" grant, which the town admin earmarked for the Open Space Committee; however records are sparse. Based on what we can find online about the original intent of this federal grant program, the Open Space Committee seems like an appropriate recipient of the funds.
- 25-26. Pay bills from a prior fiscal year?** We don't always get invoiced on time. These are expenses incurred in the 2024-25 fiscal year that need to be paid out of the 2025-26 budget.
- 27-28. Request special legislation to allow our public servants to serve past the age of 65?** The mandatory retirement age for police and fire professionals is 65; if towns want to permit people to continue to serve beyond that, special legislation is required. This will allow us to continue to employ Michael Habel and Howard Boyden, who are totally fit.
- 29. Eliminate the municipal caucus for local elections?** We currently use an antiquated process of public, in-person gathering for the nomination of candidates for local elections. This requires a minimum number of voters to convene, which has been increasingly hard to gather in recent years. Most often candidates wind up submitting paperwork outside of the caucus anyway, which has always been an alternative; given the sparse attendance at and difficulty of convening caucuses, the town clerk would like to eliminate the caucus entirely, which may require an act of legislation. A YES vote would allow the town to submit this request to the state.
- 30 & 31. Transfer the latest revenue from the Community Preservation Fund and money from the Community Preservation Fund Undesignated Reserve to various line items in that fund?** We have to specify annually how we want our CPA money to be spent.
- 32. Amend the town bylaws on Planning Board and ZBA membership?** A YES vote would allow a Planning Board or ZBA member who moves out of town during their term to either remain on the board to serve out their term, or be appointed to a one-year non-voting term within 18 months of leaving Conway.
- 33 & 34. Amend our zoning bylaws to account for statewide changes in Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) legislation?** A YES vote would refine/define and make distinctions between different types of dwelling units and zoning districts.

35. Adopt changes to the Franklin Regional Council of Governments Charter? Proposed changes expand eligibility for municipal membership on the FRCOG Council and Executive Committee, restructure the Franklin Regional Planning Board (reducing its size, allowing subject matter experts and more aptly calling it an advisory board), clarify procedures for filling vacancies and joining or leaving the FRCOG, and simplify the charter amendment process for future changes.

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
- **CGS** - Conway Grammar School
- **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)
- **FRCOG** - 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
- **ZBA** - Zoning Board of Appeals