



TOWN OF NEEDHAM

TOWN HALL

Needham, MA 02492-2669

Office of the
TOWN MANAGER

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TO: Town Meeting Members
FROM: Select Board
DATE: October 2, 2020
RE: Special Town Meeting Articles 1 & 3

At the recommendation of the Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools, and after consultation with the School Committee and Finance Committee, the Select Board voted to withdraw Articles 1 and 3 from the October 4, 2020 Special Town Meeting Warrant. The withdrawal is based on timing and uncertainty of exact costs, and not because the Board believes that funding is not needed.

The Town and School Departments have each identified potential costs in the range of several million dollars due to the pandemic. These include staffing for the mandated remote academy for over 650 students at all grade levels; remote learning and remote work technology, personal protective equipment, installation of barriers, plexiglass, and signage, tent rentals, public health contact tracing, ventilation and building system retro-commissioning and repair, additional custodial support, increased cleaning and disinfecting supplies, and the like.

The main reason for the delayed request for appropriation is the level of uncertainty, both in terms of costs and revenue, as follows:

- The State budget for FY2021 has not been set, and the amounts available to the Town in local aid and the special education circuit breaker are not confirmed.
- Rules relating to the Muni-Cares Act funding – a pass through financial assistance program administered by the State to cities, towns and schools – and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – are changing, , and there is uncertainty about what costs will be reimbursable.
- The timing and availability of FEMA funding is unknown.
- There are many variables impacting the actual costs that the Town may incur, and Schools have only opened for in-person learning this week.
- The Town's Free Cash – a potential funding source for the appropriation – will not be certified in time for the Special Town Meeting.

It is our view that the most prudent course of action is to present an article to the Town Meeting in May. The Select Board, School Committee and Finance Committee will continue to monitor cost estimates associated with responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.