

TOWN OF DALTON
BERKSHIRE COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

WAHCONAH REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
150 OLD WINDSOR ROAD, DALTON, MA
MONDAY, MAY 5, 2025 AT 7:00 P.M.

MOTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

ARTICLE 1. I move that the Town, in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 44, Section 53E½, fix the maximum amounts that may be spent during the fiscal year beginning on July 1, 2025 for the revolving funds established in town by-laws, as summarized in the table below, as on file and available for viewing in the office of the Town Clerk, for certain departments, boards, committees, agencies or officers, with such expenditure limits to be applicable for each fiscal year until such time as Town Meeting votes, prior to July 1 for the ensuing fiscal year, to revise the same.

<u>Revolving Fund</u>	<u>FY26 Spending Limit</u>	<u>Disposition of FY26 Fund Balance</u>
Plumbing Inspector	\$15,000.00	Balance available for expenditure
Electrical Inspector	\$10,000.00	Balance available for expenditure
Tree Warden/ Planning Board	\$5,000.00	Balance available for expenditure
Cemetery Department	\$2,500.00	Balance up to \$2,500.00 available for expenditure, remainder reverts to the General Fund
Council on Aging - Transportation	\$20,000.00	Balance available for expenditure
Council on Aging - Programs	\$15,000.00	Balance available for expenditure
Cemetery Department	\$5,000.00	Balance available for expenditure
Legal Advertising	\$3,000.00	Balance up to \$3,000 available for expenditure, remainder reverts to the General Fund
Parks Maintenance	\$2,000.00	Balance available for expenditure
Highway Department (Boom Mower)	\$9,000.00	Balance available for expenditure

Section 53E½ of Chapter 44 of the Massachusetts General Laws authorizes the establishment of revolving funds for certain town departments with specific receipts credited to each fund, the purposes for which each fund may be spent and the maximum that may be spent from each fund for the fiscal year. A yes vote sets spending limits for several Revolving Funds for departments, which receive and expend revenues for a particular purpose.

ARTICLE 2. I move that the Town adopt the “Schedule of Compensation for Elected Officials” for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025 as follows: Moderator \$457, Town Clerk \$66,870, Select Board Chair \$5,232, other Select Board members \$4,162 each.

Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 41, Section 108 requires that the Town vote upon the salaries of elected officials. A yes vote establishes the schedule of salaries presented above.

ARTICLE 3. I move that the Town raise and appropriate the amounts set forth in the printed report of the Finance Committee for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025 (FY2026), totaling 11,048,759; for the several purposes therein itemized, each numbered item being considered as a separate appropriation, and that the same be expended only for such purposes.

A yes vote on the Town FY2026 Operating Budget appropriates the above total for all town departments, boards and commissions, including contractual and intergovernmental services and payment of principal and interest on debt. See the Report of the Finance Committee included in the Town Report for a more detailed explanation of this Article. This budget does not include schools and accounts appropriated under other Articles. A yes vote, without amendments, authorizes the operating budget as presented. It provides a pay raise for all Town employees based on a recent classification and compensation study. The Town operating budget, not including schools, has a 9.18% increase this year (\$934,436); last year’s increase was 7.6%, and the year before was 10.1%. Please note that health insurance is rising \$265,529, and vocational schools are rising \$237,359, for a total from just those two accounts of \$502,888, well over half the increase. Salaries are scheduled to rise \$231,972, or 6.16%, much of which is due to FY26 being the first year of new 3-year union contracts. Next year’s salary rise should be about 3.8%.

ARTICLE 4. I move that the Town raise and appropriate the sum of \$9,216,038 for the purpose of paying the Town’s share of the Operating Budget of the Central Berkshire Regional School District for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025.

A yes vote adopts the CBRSD operating budget for Dalton as recommended by the Finance Committee. Excluding capital expenses, but including the transportation assessment of \$331,115 (see Article 5), the Town’s share of the CBRSD budget rose from \$9,209,094 to \$9,547,153; an increase of \$338,059, or 3.67%, from the previous fiscal year.

ARTICLE 5. I move that the Town raise and appropriate the sum of \$331,115 for the purpose of paying the Town’s share of the Transportation Budget of the Central Berkshire Regional School District for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025.

A yes vote appropriates the sum of \$331,115 for the purpose of paying the Town’s share of the FY 2026 CBRSD Transportation Budget. The proposed assessment is 9.97% higher than the previous fiscal year, an increase of \$30,014. See the Report of the Finance Committee and the CBRSD Budget, which were included in the Town Report, for a more complete explanation of this Article.

ARTICLE 6. I move that the Town raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,585,218 for the purpose of paying the Town’s share of the Capital Budget of the Central Berkshire Regional School District for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025.

A yes vote appropriates the sum of \$1,585,218 for the purpose of paying the Town's share of the FY 2026 Capital Budget of the Central Berkshire Regional School District for previously approved projects, a rise of \$257,268 from last year. The two payments are for debts excluded from the provisions of Proposition 2½ Wahconah Renovation (for demolished WRHS), \$56,863, and the new Wahconah High School Building, \$1,528,355 (Please note that debt-excluded projects do not permanently increase the limit on the Town's levy, or real estate tax). See the Report of the Finance Committee and the CBRSD Budget, included in the Town Report, for a more complete explanation of this Article.

ARTICLE 7. I move that the Town transfer the sum of \$60,000 from Free Cash to the Reserve Fund for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025.

A yes vote authorizes the transfer of \$60,000 from Free Cash to the Reserve Fund. Transfers from available funds do not have an impact on the tax rate. The Finance Committee transfers money from the Reserve Fund to expenditure accounts to pay for unforeseen expenses throughout the fiscal year. This Article is level-funded from last year.

ARTICLE 8. I move that the Town transfer the sum of \$200,000 from Free Cash for the purpose of reducing or offsetting the expected tax rate increase in the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025.

A yes vote transfers \$200,000 from Free Cash in the Treasury for the purpose of reducing the expected tax rate increase in Fiscal Year 2026. This is intended to offset the expected grant for Dispatch services; if the usual grant were for some reason not to be given, the Town would cover the expenses, and this transfer would cease.

ARTICLE 9. I move that the Town appropriate the sum of \$347,869 from available funds to be reimbursed by a grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in accordance with Chapter 90, Section 34, of the Massachusetts General Laws, and any other enabling statute, for the purposes of highway maintenance, repaving, and similar roadway expenditures; and further, to authorize the Select Board to enter into contracts or grant agreements with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for such purposes as necessary.

A yes vote authorizes expenditures of \$347,869 to be reimbursed via "Chapter 90" grants. The grants will be used primarily for highway repaving projects. The annual allocation is based on miles of roadway, population, and employment. The Highway Superintendent prepares a schedule of projects to be approved by the Town Manager and Select Board as part of the Capital Improvement Program.

ARTICLE 10. I move that the Town transfer the sum of \$34,116 from the Sewer Stabilization Fund to pay the City of Pittsfield for the additional costs of sewage treatment in the 2024 fiscal year.

The annual bill from Pittsfield for sewage treatment was higher than originally estimated by the City. Each year, the Town pays for the prior year's usage, based on a bill from the City of Pittsfield. For FY 2024, the estimate was \$34,116 lower than the final bill.

ARTICLE 11. I move that the Town transfer from Free Cash: the sum of \$100,000 to the General Stabilization Fund; the sum of \$100,000 to the Capital Stabilization Fund; and the sum of \$100,000 to the Sewer Stabilization Fund.

A yes vote authorizes moving the amounts specified into the stabilization funds specified.

ARTICLE 12. I move that the Town transfer from Free Cash the sum of \$100,000 to the Other Post-Employment Benefits Liability Trust Fund to reduce the unfunded actuarial liability of health care and other post-employment benefits.

A yes vote authorizes the transfer of Free Cash cited above to the established OPEB trust fund. With sufficient on-going funding, the Town would be able to pay all future benefits out of the trust. The Governmental Accounting Standards Board now requires that the total projected cost of post-employment benefits be reported on financial statements. Our current OPEB liability is fully funded, though we expect to add some funds every year to account for increases in health care costs and to maintain a positive balance in case of a loss of value to our investments.

ARTICLE 13. I move that the Town rescind its vote taken under the Article 1 of the warrant for the May 1, 2017 Annual Town Meeting that authorized the disposition of the old Dalton High School for “demolition of the building and sale of the property for redevelopment for houses in accordance with the Zoning By-laws of the Town at that site”.

(TWO-THIRDS VOTE REQUIRED)

A yes vote would allow the Town to use the old High School property for any purpose rather than just selling it for housing. This would include considering the property for a municipal facility, including a new police station.

ARTICLE 14. I move that the Town vote to accept the provisions of M.G.L. Chapter 60, Section 62A, to authorize the Treasurer to enter into payment plans with taxpayers.

A yes vote on this local option formalizes the authority of the Town Treasurer to enter into payment agreements with delinquent taxpayers. While we currently enter into such agreements, they would have a better legal status in case of a dispute if this option were accepted.

ARTICLE 15. I move that the Town vote to accept the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 59, Section 5, Clause Twenty-second I, increasing the amount of the tax exemption granted to veterans on their domiciles under Clause Twenty-second, Clause Twenty-second A, Clause Twenty-second B, Clause Twenty-second C, Clause Twenty-second E and Clause Twenty-second F of General Law Chapter 59, Section 5, annually by a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) determined by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) based on the Consumer Price Index, to be effective for any fiscal year beginning on or after July 1, 2025.

A yes vote would authorize the Town to provide additional tax exemptions to eligible veterans. Currently, 34 veterans receive \$400 in exemptions pursuant to Clauses 22 (a-f), and 18 veterans receive \$1,000 in exemptions pursuant to clause (e).

Accepting the provisions of Clause 22I would add \$1,580 to the total exemption (at an assumed 5% COLA): instead of exempting \$31,600, the Town would be exempting a total of \$33,180; with only a \$1,580 annual cost to the Town.

Accepting both (assuming a 5% COLA for 22I) would result in an additional \$33,180 to the current exemptions and a \$33,180 total annual cost for the Town.

ARTICLE 16. I move that the Town vote to accept the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 59, Section 5, Clause Twenty-second J, increasing the tax exemption granted to veterans on their domiciles under Clause Twenty-second, Clause Twenty-second A, Clause Twenty-second B, Clause Twenty-second C, Clause Twenty-second E and Clause Twenty-second F of General Law Chapter 59, Section 5, by an amount equal to 100 percent of the exemption provided thereunder, subject to the conditions in Clause Twenty-second J, to be effective for any fiscal year beginning on or after July 1, 2025.

Accepting clause 22J would double the exemption under Clause 22I, adding another \$31,600 to the total exempted amount. That is, instead of exempting a total of \$31,600 the Town would be exempting a total of \$63,200. Only \$31,600 of that amount would be non-reimbursable from DOR, so the additional annual cost of \$31,600 would fall on the Town.

Accepting both clauses 22I and 22J (Articles 15 and 16), assuming a 5% COLA for 22I, would result in an additional \$33,180 to the current exemptions and a \$33,180 total annual cost for the Town.

ARTICLE 17. I move that the Town vote to accept the provisions of M.G.L. Chapter 200A, Section 9A, an alternative procedure for disposing of abandoned funds held in the custody of the Town.

A yes vote would allow the Town to retain funds identified as abandoned instead of turning them over to the state.

ARTICLE 18. I move that the Town vote to instruct the Dalton Cemetery Trustees to allow Green Burials at Ashuelot Cemetery and to create rules and regulations governing such burial.

A yes vote would authorize the Cemetery Trustees, the sponsors of this article, to allow “green” or “natural” burials and to create the accompanying rules and regulations regarding such burials.

ARTICLE 19. I move that the Town vote to authorize the Select Board to sell the landlocked parcel of land of 9.5 acres, more or less, identified as Assessors’ Lot 215-13, located off North Street.

(TWO-THIRDS VOTE REQUIRED)

A yes vote would authorize the Select Board to sell the one remaining parcel of land on North Mountain that was taken for non-payment of taxes. Three other parcels, which were under the state’s Agricultural Restriction Program, were recently sold separately.

ARTICLE 20. I move that the Town vote to approve payment of an outstanding bill in the amount of \$202.00 to Training Force USA for professional development for a Police Officer from a prior fiscal year.

(FOUR-FIFTHS VOTE REQUIRED)

A yes vote would authorize the Town to pay a bill from a prior year. Such bills require Town Meeting approval for payment.

ARTICLE 21. I move that the Town approve the amendments to the Town's zoning by-laws, Article IX (Accessory Structures and Uses), Section 350-39.1, as printed in the warrant.

(TWO-THIRDS VOTE REQUIRED)

A yes vote would bring Dalton's accessory dwelling unit by-law into compliance with state requirements.

ARTICLE 22. I move that the Town transfer the following amount from Free Cash for the purpose of funding the purchase and equipping of departmental equipment in accordance with the Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Program, including any incidental or related costs:

A) \$90,000 for a cruiser for the Police Department

I move that the Town transfer the following amount from Free Cash for the purpose of funding the purchase and equipping of departmental equipment in accordance with the Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Program, including any incidental or related costs:

B) \$250,000 for a truck with sewer flushing equipment for the Department of Public Works.

A yes vote would authorize the Town to use its certified free cash to purchase the departmental vehicles specified.

ARTICLE 23. I move that the Town transfer from Free Cash the following amounts for the purpose of funding the purchase and equipping of the following items in accordance with the Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Program, including all incidental and related costs:

Department of Public Works:

1) \$16,000 for a Sidewalk Scan project to analyze and grade the condition of sidewalks throughout town;

Buildings and Grounds Department:

\$16,000 for painting the walls on the second floor in Town Hall;
\$238,000 for improvements to Town Hall plumbing;
\$68,000 for a replacement chair lift;

Town Manager's office:

\$25,000 for an update to the Town's wage and classification system; and

Senior Center:

\$5,000 for an upgrade to the audio system.

A yes vote would authorize the Town to use its certified free cash to purchase the items and services specified.

ARTICLE 24. I move that the Town authorize the borrowing of \$880,000 for the Fiscal Year 2026 capital expense of Town Hall improvements, including an upgrade to the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning capacity and associated expenses, including all costs incidental or related thereto and including all borrowing costs associated therewith; and further, to authorize the Treasurer, with the approval of the Select Board, to borrow said sum under Chapter 44, Section 7 of the Massachusetts General Laws, or any other enabling authority, and that the Select Board is authorized to take any other action necessary to carry out this project; and further, that any premium received by the Town upon the sale of any bonds or notes approved by this vote, less any premium applied to the payment of the costs of issuance of such bonds or notes, may be applied to the payment of costs approved by this vote in accordance with Chapter 44, Section 20 of the Massachusetts General Laws, thereby reducing by a like amount the amount authorized to be borrowed to pay such costs.

(TWO-THIRDS VOTE REQUIRED)

A yes vote is the first step in authorizing the Town to borrow money for installing an HVAC system in Town Hall, which currently has no ventilation. A yes vote would have to be followed by a ballot vote for the borrowing to be debt-excluded (that is, causing only a temporary rise in the Town's debt limit).

ARTICLE 25. I move that the Town vote to authorize the Select Board to petition the legislature to amend Section 5 of the Dalton Town Manager Act, as printed in the warrant.

This will also be a question on the ballot for the Town's May 12, 2025 election.

ARTICLE 26. I move that the Town authorize the Select Board to petition the legislature to remove the Police Department from Civil Service, as printed in the warrant.

A yes vote would re-affirm the vote taken May 2, 2022, approving the Town withdrawal from the state's Civil Service program and allowing the Police Department a much broader selection of potential recruits.

ARTICLE 27. I move that the Town amend its Noise By-law as printed in the warrant.

A yes vote would codify existing policy that authorizes the Board of Health to address commercial noise complaints and the Police Department to address residential noise complaints.

ARTICLE 28. *by citizen petition*

This article is by citizens' petition and the citizens will move and explain the article.

ARTICLE 29. *by citizen petition*

This article is by citizens' petition and the citizens will move and explain the article.

ARTICLE 30. *by citizen petition*

This article is by citizens' petition and the citizens will move and explain the article.

ARTICLE 31. I move that the Town recess until MONDAY, MAY 12, 2025 at 11:00 O'CLOCK A.M. to 7:00 O'CLOCK P.M. to meet in the DALTON SENIOR CENTER, 40 Field Street Extension in Dalton, MA, to choose and elect the Town officers as printed in the warrant and determine other such other matters as are by law required to be determined by ballot.