

**EGREMONT SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
MARCH 27, 2018
FINANCE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

ARTICLE 1:

Finance Committee recommends approval 5 yes, 1 absent.

Our new police chief started in March 2018 and will receive the same salary as our interim chief, Brian Shaw, until the end of this fiscal year (June 30, 2018). Because that salary is higher than the salary of the old chief, Tyler Race, and because the interim chief and new chief will overlap the month of March, total additional funds of **\$14,700** are required.

ARTICLE 2:

Finance Committee recommends approval 5 yes, 1 absent.

The Town Clerk has requested funds for a voting tabulator. We have almost 1,000 registered voters currently. The current wooden voting box is 100 years old and could malfunction at any time, possibly in the middle of an election. It is difficult to find replacement parts or a repairman who can service it. Our poll workers are counting ballots until very late in the morning at times; they were there until 2:00 a.m. in the November 2016 election. The cost of a tabulator is \$5,700, which will be paid for by \$3,335 from state polling funds and \$2,365 from our election wages account. A town meeting must approve using funds designated for a specific purpose (in this case election wages) to be used for another purpose. The annual maintenance/servicing of the machine will cost \$250 per year after a two year warranty expires and there will be printing and programming costs each election which will range between \$800 and \$1,300 per year. The tabulator will result in a small amount of savings in the election wages account.

ARTICLE 3:

Finance Committee recommends approval 3 yes, 2 no, 1 absent.

To date, the town has spent about \$54,000 on planning for repairs to the South Egremont school building, most of which has come from grants. To pay for the repairs, there is presently available a total of \$291,500, comprised of \$115,000 in previously raised taxes, \$28,000 in contributions, \$30,000 remaining from a grant for engineering and incidentals and \$98,500 from a transfer of funds from the library account (which must be paid back at some point). The town has received a bid for the repairs of \$358,000; that bid does not include anything for ADA compliance or other possible or unanticipated repair costs. The difference between that bid and the amount presently available to pay for the repairs is \$66,500 (\$358,000 less \$291,500). This warrant article seeks an additional \$75,000, which would provide a small cushion over the amount required to cover the bid. The selectmen will provide additional information at the special town meeting.

The Finance Committee members in favor of the article view these necessary repairs to this historic building as essential to its use as a school (it cannot function as a school without this work) and also essential if it is to be re-purposed for town use, sold as a commercial property, or converted/sold as a residential property. We do not see this building as useable or saleable in its current condition. It would therefore sit in the middle of South Egremont as empty eyesore in need of repair. The town needs more residential and commercial activity – not less. Going forward, if its future is not as a school (which will be determined in the near future), then the town must pursue the above alternatives in order to recoup some or all of these expenditures and enhance the character and economic viability of South Egremont. We do not believe it is useful or helpful to speculate or guess as to the worth of the building “as is” when a better path is to fix the problem so we have some alternatives to work with that will benefit the town.

The Finance Committee members opposed to the article believe (a) that the school will be closed, most likely this year pursuant to the formal procedure recently begun by the school committee, (b) that it is imprudent to spend any money on the building at a time when the school’s future is so uncertain, (c) that spending at least \$425,000 and as much as \$550,000 on a building that is likely worth not even one-third of that amount is indefensible, (d) that the total cost of repairing the building is still uncertain and no money should be spent until the total cost is fully and finally determined, (e) that the building is not needed for any town purpose and no realistic alternative use for the building has been identified, (f) that the building, far from being an “asset” of the town, is in fact a liability of the town (similar to the “annex” adjacent to town hall) and (g) that the money set aside thus far for repairing the building can better be allocated to other town purposes.

ARTICLE 4:

Finance Committee makes no recommendation.

ARTICLE 5:

Finance Committee makes no recommendation.

ARTICLE 6:

Finance Committee recommends approval 5 yes, 1 absent.

Three years ago, at the request of the BOS, the Finance Committee participated in the development of a Bylaw for outdoor recreational facilities. The special group included folks from several committees and residents who had insight into outdoor recreation. The Finance Committee recommends approval of this Bylaw as a practical guide to inform business people of the Town’s expectations of how to create and lead outdoor businesses that provide critical economic value (jobs, tax revenue) and fit well with the economic goals and social values of our Town.