



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS on the Amherst Override

For the sake of neutrality, the Jones Library Trustees have chosen to take no position on this or on the previous two overrides.

What is an override? In 1980, Massachusetts voters passed a state law called Proposition 2-1/2. This limits Massachusetts cities and towns to an increase of 2.5% per year in their overall property taxes. However, Proposition 2-1/2 lets communities vote to “override” this limit.

What would the current override do? The 2010 Amherst override would raise a maximum of \$1.68 million through property taxes. If it passes, the funds will be allocated as follows: \$400,000 for elementary schools; \$739,195 for middle and high schools; \$452,252 for Town operations; and \$88,994 for the Jones, Munson, and North Amherst libraries.

How much could this override cost me? If the override is fully implemented, the property tax of an average home (\$334,600 value) would increase by \$264 per year – that’s \$22 per month.

The Library recently received a large gift. Why does it still need funds from the Town? For any public library in the Commonwealth to be state certified, Massachusetts law requires that a municipality appropriate each year, from local tax revenues, a minimum dollar amount for its library. This amount is called a Minimum Appropriation Requirement, or MAR.

No private gift or grant can count toward a town’s Minimum Appropriation Requirement.

Is the Minimum Appropriation Requirement important? Yes. Only state-certified public libraries are eligible for interlibrary loans and certain government grants. In the current year, for the first time ever, Town Meeting voted to appropriate less than our MAR. A state waiver of this year’s MAR saved our grants and residents’ access to interlibrary loans.

If the override passes, will the Library be state-certified next year? Yes. The amount requested in the override will allow the Town to meet its Minimum Appropriation Requirement for next year. This will assure state certification. The Jones, Munson, and North Amherst Libraries can still provide the information and education services that they offer this year.

If the override does not pass, then what? Town Meeting could still pass a Library budget that meets the MAR. If it does not, the Library would cut even more, and would apply for another waiver of our MAR. Both years’ MAR shortfalls would add to the following year’s MAR.

For more information about the Minimum Appropriation Requirement, please see http://mbhc.state.ma.us/grants/state_aid/blog/category/state-aid-to-public-libraries/

What if Town Meeting does not vote the MAR for next year? In that case, likely Library cuts include fewer staff to help patrons of all ages; get new books and movies catalogued and on the shelves; answer patrons’ research questions; issue library cards for new patrons; supervise children’s programs; and check out books, movies, and CDs. The Jones could again be closed on Friday afternoons, as well — and this when we need our libraries more than ever.

What have Town libraries done so far to reduce costs? They have cut their budgets for the last **seven years**. This year they bought **3,900 fewer titles**, cutting purchases of books, movies, and CDs by 30% to a level below that of 1998. The **Jones closed** on Monday

mornings. It closed on Friday afternoons until private donations temporarily allowed reopening. Both **Munson and North Amherst closed** one afternoon per week. Town libraries **cut staff hours** by the equivalent of two full time employees. The English as a Second Language coordinator's position has been cut from 12 months of the year to 10. Teen activities, staff training, and **computer classes** have been **cut**. Volunteers now reshelve all books. Last year **volunteers contributed 19,706 hours, the equivalent of 10 full time employees** or at least \$157,888 – 25% of the work hours required to deliver library services; and the Director and professional librarians have made **wage concessions**.

How do library cuts affect our community? Public libraries are key to individual economic recovery, retraining, and reemployment. Amherst residents depend on our for computer access, job searches, research, to run businesses, to study, and for books, periodicals, movies, and CDs. Visitors from the nation and abroad come to the Jones for its Special Collections of Amherst authors and history. Downtown Amherst restaurants and other businesses depend on this cultural tourism.

How many people use the Amherst libraries now? Amherst libraries have more than 312,000 patron visits per year. There are more than 1,500,000 hits per year on www.joneslibrary.org, plus more than 7,000 hits per month on the Special Collections' www.digitalamherst.org.

How can I calculate what Amherst's libraries are worth to me? See for yourself what you save. The Value Calculator on the Jones Library's website lets you add up your savings each month. www.joneslibrary.org/budget/libraryvalue.html.

What about the Munson and North Amherst Libraries? Last year, patrons borrowed 36,255 items at North Amherst and 40,854 items at the Munson. The North Amherst Library supports the Headstart program. Munson conducts special programs with Crocker Farm Elementary School students. Both branches, as well as the Jones, have popular schoolchildren's summer reading programs. The branches are also vital centers for their respective communities. They are a bargain.

What is Town Meeting's role? It votes the Library budget. You can support your libraries by contacting Town Meeting members, members of the Select Board, and Finance Committee members.

What does the Library endowment contribute? The endowment, started in 1919, built the Jones Library. Along with other private donations, it now funds 25% of the libraries' annual budget. For FY 2011, the Trustees voted to spend \$111,541 more than investment advisors recommend if the endowment is to last. The more we use now, however, the greater our children's tax burden will be.

Do the libraries actively raise private funds? Yes! Volunteer Friends of the Jones Library System and Trustees do this. You may donate at any of the libraries and online at www.joneslibrary.org.

Where do I vote on the override? To find your voting precinct number and address, call the Jones Library Reference Desk, 413.259.3096, or go to www.wheredoivotema.com/bal/myelectioninfo.php.

What will the ballot look like? The sample ballot for your precinct is on display at the Jones Library and on the Town's website, www.amherstma.gov. Search for "Sample Ballots."

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