

Dear Northampton Voters,

This is an extraordinary time in local history. The public is quite active in signaling to elected officials that our government must support our community. You have an expectation for core municipal services to be delivered in full: you want better roads and sidewalks, affordable taxes, and thriving public schools, to name a few of the desires of Ward 3 and beyond.

What is so special about this moment is your unwavering commitment to civic participation -- your thoughtful questions, mindful discourse, and public demonstrations. Even our children are creatively, persistently carrying the banner of democracy at every turn, all on their own. It's remarkable!

And so, as I continue my quiet study of the workings of our budget, uncovering and crafting solutions for your consideration, it is also my duty to keep you abreast of processes you may wish to impact through your own actions.

Public voices succeeded in winning the school committee's vote for a level-services budget, one without any cuts. However, at present this vote is only symbolic. In order to transform it into a real number that city council can use in our budget, the city must "opt in" to a statute granting council that ability.

If we don't opt in, the mayor alone will decide how much money to give our schools. Last week, 40 pink slips -- layoffs and involuntary transfers -- were delivered to school staff, setting the stage for the deep cuts proposed by the mayor to date. So this is a critical moment to democratize our budgeting.

This month, we will move through several important steps in arriving at a final budget. I recommend we take things one step at a time, so as not to get overwhelmed. I will do my best to keep you informed as we move through it.

### **Current Step: The "Opt-In"**

**What it is:** If city council and the mayor choose to opt in and accept the provisions of MGL Ch. 44, Sec. 32, city council will officially be able to give schools up to the full amount recommended by the school committee when we amend the mayor's budget in June.

**What's at stake:** If we don't opt in, funding for schools will remain capped at whatever amount the mayor chooses. So far, she has said cuts to schools are necessary, although I believe there are alternatives that wouldn't require cuts to essential services (including schools) and wouldn't further burden taxpayers.

**How to participate:** There is room at the table for everyone's concerns and ideas, including yours! Write to your electeds, give them a call, invite them for coffee; talk with your neighbors, show up at meetings, and make a public comment in person or by Zoom. Here are some upcoming public events:

#### **May 8th, 5:30 p.m., at JFK**

Community forum hosted by NASE to discuss the budget, opt-in, PILOTs, etc.

#### **May 9th, 6:30 p.m., at JFK (hybrid)**

School committee will vote on whether to recommend that the city "opt in"

#### **May 13th, 5:30 p.m., in Council Chambers (hybrid)**

City council committees on Finance and Legislative Matters will vote on whether to recommend that the city "opt in"

#### **May 16, 6:30 p.m., in Council Chambers (hybrid)**

The city council will vote on whether to "opt in." (The mayor's assent will also eventually be needed.)

Remember that you yourself are as good a resource as I am -- or as any of your neighbors are. Share what you know, ask about things you want to know, and don't forget that civics is a real team effort! We are stronger together.

And off we go,  
Quaverly H. Rothenberg

Ward 3 City Councilor, Northampton

[Click here for guest column on the budget](#)



