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Fiscal concerns rule at South Hadley TM

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SOUTH HADLEY - Fiscal concerns dominated the debate and subsequent voting at a lengthy, 55-article annual Town Meeting in South Hadley Saturday.

As recommended by the appropriations committee, $75,000 was slashed from next year's schools budget. The school budget accounts for nearly half of the town's overall $39 million budget.

Town Meeting members debated that issue and a $20,000 economic revitalization plan appropriation, which was turned down, for around an hour apiece, said Select Board Vice Chairman Robert G. Judge. Members also rejected the purchase of a $150,000 dump truck, a $50,000 appropriation to review and revise the zoning bylaw, a $36,000 measure to replace a freezer at Mosier School, a $25,000 replacement of floor tiles at the high school, and the replacement of toilet partitions at the middle and Mosier schools, he said.

The $20,000 appropriation, which would go toward an economic revitalization plan for South Hadley Falls, and the $50,000 zoning bylaw review and revisions might be reconsidered at the fall Town Meeting, said Select Board Chairman John R. Hine.

Those who voiced a lack of support for the revitalization plan appropriation felt there were not enough specifics about how the $20,000 would be spent, which is something the Select Board hopes to address should the measure reappear on the fall meeting's warrant, Hine said.

"Capital items that weren't approved were not because they are not good items, but because of a shortage of money," said Judge. "We believe that next year's budget (FY12)will be even tighter than this year. We can't spend all of our savings this year. Everyone knows that, and that's the concern."

Much of the voting on spending-related articles followed the financially conservative recommendations made by the appropriations committee, added Hine.

The meeting at Town Hall ran from 9:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., but despite its unusually long duration, quorum was kept throughout and the debate remained civil and polite, which has not always been the case, Judge said.

Call for youth activities board

In response to the much publicized bullying that allegedly led to a high school student's suicide, voters easily approved the formation of a commission to organize activities for the community's youth.

The Select Board will appoint between three and 21 members to the commission in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40, Section 8E, but it will also seek input from residents and from other communities with similar commissions on how to best structure the board, Hine said.

"Some people feel there are not enough activities for the youth outside of schools, and I can understand that. I believe a youth commission can be a part of solving problem" said Judge, who is also the Select Board representative to the town's anti-bullying task force, prior to Saturday's meeting.

The creation of five other boards and commissions also passed, while a motion to move Town

Meeting from Saturday to two weeknights and two zoning bylaw amendments were defeated.

Also, resident and Family Cuts hair salon owner Mary Sudyka won the annual Lions Club Citizen of the Year Award for her volunteer efforts in collecting donations and running fundraisers for various causes.

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