



CITY OF MELROSE

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

PAUL BRODEUR
Mayor

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MEMORANDUM

To: City Council President Jennifer Grigoraitis
From: Mayor Paul Brodeur
Re: Proposed Debt Exclusion Ballot Question for Public Safety Buildings
Date: August 21, 2023

Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 59, § 21C, I hereby offer to the Honorable City Council for consideration the following language for a debt exclusion ballot question to be placed before the voters of Melrose on the November 7, 2023 election ballot:

Shall the City of Melrose be allowed to exempt from the provisions of proposition two and one-half, so called, the amounts required to pay for the bonds issued in order to pay costs for design, engineering, construction, site improvements, equipping, and furnishing of a renovated Melrose Central Fire Station, a new Melrose Highlands Fire Station, and a new Melrose Police Station, and all other costs incidental and related thereto?

Yes _____ No _____

The form of all Proposition 2 ½ ballot questions is dictated by state election law. Unlike an override, a ballot question for a debt exclusion does not provide for including a specific dollar amount. The language and form of a ballot question for any debt exclusion leaves only a portion to be completed by the city/town relative to the purpose for the appropriation. The purpose of this proposed debt exclusion would therefore be to replace or renovate three of the four existing public safety buildings.

As the Public Safety Building Committee noted when they presented their final report to the Council last month, the cost to renovate or replace all four existing public safety buildings has been estimated at \$130 million. At our current average single-family home value, the estimated impact to the average homeowner of a four-building project would be approximately \$875 per year for all but a few years of a 30-year bond. By contrast, the estimated cost of doing three buildings is \$95 million, with the tax impact to an average residential property owner of approximately \$641 per year¹.

Given the magnitude of these costs, I believe that the reasonable and prudent path forward would be not to replace the existing East Side Fire Station building at this time in the interests of addressing the more dire state of the other two fire stations and the clear need for a modern police station while also balancing other fiscal needs of the City. Among these are significant future costs to renovate several of our elementary schools that we expect to be made clear through the school space needs study, as well as

¹ Tax impact estimates are intended to help local officials analyze the effect on the local tax rates from hypothetical changes to the levy resulting from debt exclusions. The estimated impact amount provided is based on the most recent tax year's data. The annual impact amount will vary with changes in the City's total assessed value, tax rate, CIP shift, and debt service structure.

millions of dollars of non-school bonded capital projects that we expect to see recommended by the Collins Center when their Capital Improvement Plan report is completed.

Per City Solicitor Shannon Phillips' July 21, 2023 memo, in order for a debt exclusion question to be placed on an election ballot in Melrose, the exact language of the question must be approved by a two thirds majority vote of City Council and must also be approved by the Mayor pursuant to Section 3-7 of the City Charter. The final language will also be reviewed by Bond Counsel.

In order for a debt exclusion question relative to the public safety buildings to be placed on the November 7, 2023 ballot, the approved language must be in the hands of the City Clerk thirty-five (35) days before the date of the election. To meet this deadline, a vote to place such a question on the ballot, subject to my approval, must take place no later than October 2, 2023. Therefore, I respectfully urge the City Council to consider this request in a timely fashion so that we may promptly place this matter before the voters of Melrose.