



**Town of Arlington
Office of the Town Manager**

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To: Members of the Select Board
Cc: Ashley Maher, Select Board Administrator
From: James Feeney, Town Manager
Date: February 13, 2026
RE: Impacts of Unsuccessful Proposition 2 ½ Override Vote

Please receive this memorandum in support of the presentation and subsequent discussion regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 27 (FY27) budget which took place at the Board's January 26th meeting.

To reiterate, the proposed FY27 budget relies on the successful passage of a proposition 2 ½ override vote slated for March 28, 2026. As submitted, the FY27 budget permits the Town's operating budget to grow 3.25% over the prior year, and the Arlington Public Schools operating budget to grow at 4% over the prior year; however, if the override vote is unsuccessful, the FY27 budget would need to be revised and resubmitted to this Board and the Finance Committee. A budget matched to a reduced revenue estimate would need to be put before Town Meeting for consideration in early May to ensure the Town approves a balanced budget prior to the start of the fiscal year on July 1, 2026.

At present, the structural deficit in FY27 is approximately \$2.7M, growing to ~\$18M and ~\$24M in FY28 and FY29 respectively. Service reductions would be phased over time to meet the growing deficits, meaning the impacts would be less severe in FY27 but would rapidly intensify

in FY28 to achieve a balanced budget. To close the deficits to meet lesser revenue figures, spending in many areas of the budget would be affected. This includes every Town departmental budget, the Capital Budget, the annual Reserve Fund, and the Arlington Public School operating budget, which would notably shoulder a significant burden in closing the structural deficit. To that same end, prior Proposition 2 ½ override commitments made by the Select Board which increased the tax levy through targeted earmarks would also need to be revisited. In effect, these commitments added additional ongoing capital expenditure in the public right of way which have grown over time and contribute to the structural deficit. These prior spending commitments rely on the continued passage of overrides to endure at current levels. It is worth noting no projects which were the subject of prior debt exclusion votes would be impacted by an unsuccessful override vote.

With respect to the impact on Town operations, there would be an iterative process by which service reductions would be introduced over time to meet the mounting deficit. While all departments would be impacted, the largest departments, such as Police, Fire, Public Works, Libraries and Health & Human Services, would necessarily face the greatest impacts. Ultimately, the effect over time would be reducing service levels to the most basic core municipal functions. Regrettably, investments in many valued community engagement activities would unavoidably decrease or even cease in certain areas in the near term.

While not an exhaustive list by any means, some examples of the tangible service level reductions within some public-facing departments are offered below to provide additional context on the process associated with reducing budgets. Budget reductions would also be necessary in operational departments serving the entire organization, such as Human Resources, Legal, Information Technology and Facilities; however, impacts such as reduced training and professional development, decreased network and infrastructure maintenance, a weakened cybersecurity posture, deferred building maintenance, and decreased level of custodial care, are all likely outcomes as only the most essential investments will survive. Municipal operations are wide-ranging and complex, but an effort was made to simplify outcomes in order to illustrate potential impacts.

Libraries

1. Robbins Library
 - a. FY27: the Robbins Library would need to begin reducing public hours. As a result, the Library could again close on Thursday mornings and may also close on Sundays.
 - b. FY28: the Robbins Library would need to implement additional cost saving measures; service cuts could include possible reductions to the printing and scanning program, as well as Teen Services and Children's Room offerings. All collections, services, and spaces are likely to be impacted.
2. Fox Library
 - a. FY27: the process to discontinue service at this branch library would commence with a reduction of public hours, including possible discontinuation of Saturday service.
 - b. FY28: all service at Fox Library would likely be discontinued.

*Importantly, per State law, the Town of Arlington's Libraries would likely face decertification in FY28 of FY29 by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) due to reduced municipal investment. Decertification would result in the loss of ~\$125k+ in State Aid annually, disqualify the Town from consideration for MBLC construction grants, and withdraw Arlington's borrowing privileges from other certified libraries within the Minuteman Library Network.

Public Works (DPW)

1. Curbside Collection
 - a. FY27: Eliminate approximately 10 weeks of yard waste collection between June-October, leaving only peak period collection during early spring and late fall (12 weeks total).
2. Seasonal Staff
 - a. FY28: The summer seasonal employment program would be discontinued. Each summer, DPW hires a number of high school and college students to assist with parks and grounds maintenance, crosswalk painting, tree watering, litter pick up and cemetery maintenance activities.
3. Food Scrap Diversion

- a. FY28: Feed FiDO food scrap drop off sites would be reduced or eliminated, as would food scrap diversion provided at Public School buildings.
- 4. Tree Planting
 - a. FY28: Cut number of new tree plantings annually in half, 300 to 150
- 5. Tree Pest Management
 - a. FY28: Discontinue Emerald Ash borer treatments across Town
- 6. Pavement Markings
 - a. FY28: Reduced budget for repainting fading roadway lines, such as yellow center lines, white edge lines, turning arrows etc.
- 7. Mobility Improvements
 - a. FY28: Reduced budget for design and construction of safety and accessibility improvements such as curb cuts, bump-outs, pedestrian activated crosswalk beacons, and radar driver speed feedback signs
- 8. Aerial Imagery
 - a. FY28: Discontinue obtaining regular updates of aerial imagery of Town for GIS platform
- 9. Street Sweeping
 - a. FY28: Reduce overnight main route/business district street sweeping frequency by half
- 10. Business District Trash Collection:
 - a. FY28: Weekend collection of waste from receptacles on Mass Ave sidewalks and Broadway Plaza would be discontinued.
- 11. Parks Trash Collection:
 - a. FY28: Collection of waste from receptacles in parks on weekends would be discontinued
 - b. FY28: Removal of waste receptacles from parks altogether would be considered, leaving all facilities as carry-in/carry-out.
- 12. Reuse & Recycle Center/Swap Shed
 - a. FY28: Reduced service offerings at Ryder St., such as takeback of cardboard, foam, bulky rigid plastics; consider potential elimination of all services offered at Ryder St. as site is again considered for lease to generate revenue.

13. Field Maintenance

- a. FY28: reduction in General Fund support for athletic field turf maintenance contract for aeration fertilization, seeding etc.; field user fees charged to youth sport groups could potentially be increased by the Recreation Department in the future to maintain existing levels of service.

Health & Human Services

1. Senior Transportation

- a. FY27: The COA Transportation Enterprise Fund would not receive the same level of General Fund support. As a result, van service would decrease significantly and there would be thousands of fewer rides offered to seniors annually. The focus of remaining weekly van service would be on in-town medical rides, reducing or eliminating through time rides to the Community Center, Town Hall, Libraries, salons/shops, grocery stores, pharmacies and Arlington EATS.

2. Senior Programming

- a. FY27: Consider elimination of the COA Senior Parking Permit program; discontinue Thanksgiving meals delivery program.
- b. FY28: Reduce programmatic offerings significantly. The number of cooking, art, and fitness classes offered would be reduced, likely in half. Celebratory luncheons for seniors, including those around Lunar New Year, Older Americans' Month and National Senior Center Month would be discontinued.

3. Public Health

- a. FY27: Eliminate Town rodent control efforts in the community.
- b. FY28: Reduced capacity to respond to nuisance complaints related to pests, noise, trash and dumpsters; reduced sharps collection offerings; increased wait times for housing inspections; fewer food safety inspections.

4. Prevention Services

- a. FY27: Eliminate Youth Health & Safety Coalition community forums and other prevention initiatives

5. Community Resource Services

- a. FY27: Discontinue programming related to housing instability and homelessness, and other supports for basic resources among most vulnerable populations
6. Youth Counseling
- a. FY27: The Arlington Youth Counseling Center (AYCC) Enterprise Fund would not receive the same level of General Fund support. As a result, the number of clinical sessions available per year would decrease significantly. At least 600 sessions impacting approximately 20 families would be lost annually.
 - b. FY28: AYCC would see a further decrease in General Fund support, which would result in scaling back groups aimed at supporting youth and their families as well as some school-based programming; there would be a further loss of up to 1200 clinical sessions impacting another roughly 35-40 families annually.
7. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- a. FY28: Reduction in language access line services and capacity to translate critical documents for non-English speaking community members

Fire Department

- 1. Community Engagement
 - a. FY27: Discontinue community service activities, such as Touch-A-Truck events in the community or at early education centers, Open Houses, SAFE (Student Awareness of Fire Education) programs in classrooms
- 2. Personnel
 - a. FY27: Impose freeze on hiring new firefighters
 - b. FY28: Significant reduction in force leading to a rotating brown-out of an apparatus. Rotating the brownout between response districts ensures the community impact has an equitable geographic distribution.
 - i. Notably, this will have a significant impact on response times. The average response time department wide is currently 3 minutes 42 seconds, while the average response time to the farthest reaches of a district is approximately 5 minutes.
 - 1. The average response time to the farthest location in each district by the next nearest district would be 8+ minutes.

2. The average response time to the farthest location in each district by the farthest district would be 10+ minutes.
 - a. This would occur when multiple calls are in progress simultaneously.

Police Department

1. Community Engagement

- a. FY27: Discontinue certain community policing activities, such as car seat installation inspections, Minuteman Bikeway patrols, homelessness outreach, Rape Aggression Defense Classes (R.A.D.), children's summer camps, Citizen's Police Academy, collaboration with the LABBB Program, bike rodeos, presence at school athletic and social events, educational programs for seniors and other groups (ex. scam awareness, personal safety, cyberbullying), National Night out, traffic assistance for community events, presence at Rainbow Commission/ Human Rights Commission/Housing Authority activities, reduction in dog/ K-9 programming.

2. Personnel

- a. FY27: Impose freeze on hiring new patrol officers.
- b. FY28: Significant reduction in force leading to narrowed focus on core 9-1-1 emergency response.
 - i. Officers assigned to Criminal Investigations Bureau and Traffic & Parking Unit would be recalled to Patrol Division to provide 9-1-1 call response, leading to reduced follow-up on: incident reports, property crimes, traffic enforcement, and myriad quality of life/disturbance issues.
- c. FY28: Discontinue officer training above and beyond mandatory, annual training required for ongoing POST certification.

3. Body-Worn Cameras

- a. FY27: Delay implementation of body-worn camera program slated for July 1, 2026.

4. Threat Assessment Program

- a. FY27: Discontinue threat assessment program providing specialized training and inspections for private businesses, houses of worship and other entities to identify vulnerabilities and make safety and security recommendations.

Inspectional Services

1. Building Permits & Inspections

- a. FY28: Reduced staffing would significantly increase wait time for issuance of building permits and conduct of building inspections.

Celebrations and Events

Events like Town Day/fireworks and the Flags on Graves program, as well as activities held on Patriots' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day and Veterans' Day would not be able to receive the same level of General Fund support and would be in jeopardy. The same would hold true for Mass Ave banner projects recognizing month-long causes, and monthly cultural observances organized through Health and Human Services.

Board and Commission Budgets

Many committees currently receive an annual appropriation to support ongoing work to engage the larger community, including investments in tourism, arts and culture, waste reduction, accessibility, and historic preservation, to name a few. These investments would not continue at current levels and these activities would be in jeopardy.

Capital Budget

Each year, the Capital Budget is prepared in accordance with longstanding policy to equate to 5% of the Town's adjusted budget, which excludes certain things such as exempt-debt service. Indeed, in the event of a failed override there will be less revenue available to support the Town's overall budget. This necessarily means there would be less capital funding available to meet the Town's infrastructure, vehicle, equipment, and building needs. The financial impact would unavoidably deepen each year over the course of the 5-Year Capital Plan.

1. FY27: It is anticipated that approximately \$175K less funding would be available for capital expenditure, potentially resulting in the following:
 - a. Cancellation of a planned network resilience project
 - b. Significantly reduced spending on refreshing APS student devices, such as Chromebooks and tablets
2. FY28: It is anticipated that approximately \$900K less funding would be available for capital expenditure, potentially threatening the following investments:
 - a. Renovation of Veteran’s Memorial Park in Arlington Center
 - b. Replacement of a Public Works heavy snow plow/sanding vehicle
 - c. Installation of EV Charging infrastructure in Town to facilitate electrification of the Town’s fleet, including its police vehicles.
3. FY28-FY31: It is anticipated that capital spending would need to be reduced by roughly 20% in the ‘out years’ of the 5 Year Capital Plan. This would result in funding only projects that have associated health, safety or habitability concerns. In effect, many categories of spending would potentially see decreased spending, such as roads and sidewalks, proactive accessibility improvements to Town buildings, electrification of buildings, and could result in deferring replacement of vehicles, tools and equipment necessary for operations within recommended timeframes.

Prior Override Commitments

As part of the 2011, 2019 and 2023 override votes, sums of money were earmarked for additional capital expenditure on roadway, accessibility, and mobility improvements. These investments have grown over time and would not continue at current levels, leaving less funding for these types of projects. In FY27, it can be expected that approximately \$180k less would be available for improving public rights of way, such as replacing brick sidewalks or improving high volume pedestrian crossings. Likewise, reduced investment in roadway maintenance would mean the Town cannot maintain a constant pavement condition index (PCI) score over time. This numerical PCI score assesses the surface condition of our road network, and a decline would indicate overall deterioration across the network.

Personnel

Of course, there would also need to be a significant reduction in force through time as the Town's largest direct operating expense is personnel, which is magnified by the associated indirect overhead burden. Workforce reduction would impact every general governmental department, spanning all job titles from public works labor service positions, to administrative, technical, and professional roles, to police officers and firefighters. To specifically identify at this time the positions that would be either eliminated or reduced would have a chilling effect on the organization and employee morale, so specific personnel reductions are not quantified or outlined herein. Nevertheless, any significant reduction in force can be assumed to greatly affect the organization's capacity and ability to respond to resident service requests and inquiries in a timely and effective manner. While challenging to quantify given the myriad services delivered across departments, the impacts to customer service and corresponding wait times cannot be understated.