

Annual Election: Debt Exclusion Questions Information Sheet

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Background

On February 15, 2022, the Athol Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to place two debt exclusion questions on the ballot that would authorize bonding costs for two projects to be exempted from Proposition 2½.

- 1) Design, engineering, repairs or replacement of the Pinedale Avenue Bridge, Fryeville Road Bridge and Crescent Street sluiceway located north of the Crescent Street Bridge.
- 2) Costs to purchase and equip a fire pumper apparatus for the Fire Department.

If a question is approved by a majority vote at the ballot box the project will go to Annual Town Meeting for consideration of issuing the bonds which will require a 2/3 affirmative vote to proceed.

Project Summaries and Estimated Costs

Pinedale, Fryeville and Crescent Bridges: \$2.5 million (estimate per Bayside Engineering).

Both the Pinedale Ave. and Fryeville Road bridges are jointly owned by the towns of Athol and Orange while the “secret bridge” under Crescent Street (separate from the new bridge installed by the state) is solely owned by Athol. Orange will contribute 50 percent of the cost for Pinedale and Fryeville.

Currently, the Pinedale Avenue bridge (see photos to right) is weight restricted due to substantial deterioration; including a two-foot diameter hole through the entire deck. Athol and Orange partnered to complete design, permitting and bid documents but Athol requires funds for its portion of actual construction costs.



The Fryeville Road bridge is the same vintage and style as Pinedale and would be undertaken after Pinedale is replaced.

The “secret bridge” under Crescent Street is separate from the main bridge replaced last year with state funding. This sluiceway is north of the main bridge and carries a portion of the Millers River directly under the Starrett complex.



Note: The Town’s Department of Public Works, Planning Department and Town Manager’s office will continue to seek state or federal grant funds to complete the work. Having local match or leveraged funds makes any grant application substantially more competitive and likely to receive funds.

Fire Pumper: \$725,000 (estimate per C&S Specialty Vehicles).

The Fire Department’s capital request states that the new apparatus would replace a 25-year-old Central States (company now defunct) pumper with numerous issues including a steel water tank in poor condition, rear-facing passenger seats that fail to meet the current safety guidelines, leaking hydrant intake valve and worn pump components.

The vehicle was purchased as an emergency replacement back in 1998 with an intended life-span of 15 years. If approved, due to current supply chain delays, the Town is expected to receive the new vehicle in 2024 by which time the current Engine 3 will be 26-years of age.



The new pumper will provide a safe and conditioned environment for up to six firefighters and the includes funding to outfit the vehicle with updated equipment per NFPA standards.

The new pumper will be specified to a similar standard as the Toyne apparatus that was purchased in 2021 with a major federal grant (pictured to the right).



Note: Chief Guarnera authored and received a federal grant exceeding \$600,000 in 2021 to replace a 40-year-old Maxim engine. The Maxim was recently donated as an “antique” for display in a New England Firefighting Museum. The 2021 federal grant award means it is highly unlikely that the Town would receive any further grant funds for this project.

Cost and Tax Implications

Figures from bond advisor Unibank Fiscal Advisory Services, Inc. and the Principal Assessor

	Bridges: \$2.5 million	Fire Apparatus: \$725,000
Tax Rate Impact	\$0.23 per 1000	\$0.17 per 1000
Average SFH Value	\$206,800	\$206,800
Average SFH Year 1 Cost	\$47.57 / year	\$35.16 / year
Term of Bond	20 years	Five (5) years

If both projects are approved at the ballot box and by Town Meeting voters the total estimated tax impact will be \$82.73 in year one for a home valued at \$206,800. This equates to \$6.89 per month.

State or Federal Assistance

As noted above, the Town Manager, Director of Planning and Development and DPW Superintendent are actively seeking any and all grant or program assistance from state or federal resources for the infrastructure (bridge) projects.

With the recent passage of the federal infrastructure bill it is expected that state programs will have more funds available for communities that are ready-to-proceed. The Governor has committed state funds to replacing the Main Street bridge over the railroad (below the intersection with Chestnut Hill Avenue) and town officials will seek to further leverage local funds to complete the projects above.